The Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the Decade of Hope, 1938-1948

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by

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my little brother, Khoa Trinh, whose spirit gives me hope every day**.**

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List of Abbreviations

Atlanta Constitution	AC
Chicago Defender	CD
Chicago Daily Tribune	CDT
Civil Rights Committee	CRC
Commission on Interracial Cooperation	CIC
Nashville Banner	NB
National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax	NCAPT
New York Times	NYT
Richmond Times-Dispatch	RTD
Southern Conference Educational Fund	SCEF
Southern Conference for Human Welfare	SCHW
Southern Regional Council	SRC
Washington Post	WP

Table of Contents

Introduction

"*[The South] is exceptional in Western nonfascist civilization since the Enlightenment in that it lacks nearly every trace of radical thought. In the South all progressive thinking going further than mild liberalism has been practically nonexistent for a century*."[1]

Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma

Political pundits, TV commentators, and historians have proclaimed that we have entered the Age of Obama. What this new age means for America's race relationships is yet to be determined. All would agree, however, that President Obama would not have broken the final barrier and became the first African-American president if not for the civil rights generation that preceded him. The Civil Rights Movement is rightly lauded as a watershed moment in American history. Men and women of all races marched and died together to challenge America to live up to its highest ideal of human liberty and equality. Most Americans would point to the *Brown* decision in 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 as the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Few know about an earlier and smaller movement that began in the South to enfranchise black voters, to obtain economic opportunity for African Americans, and to abolish racial segregation. The most astonishing aspect of this movement was that it was instigated and

[1] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 469-70.

led by white southern liberals of an interracial organization known as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW).

When the term "southern liberals" is brought up, it often elicits one of two responses: "Were there any?" and "Is that an oxymoron?"[2] Southern liberalism appears to many, then and now, as a strange and rare phenomenon. The South, a region that had fought a bloody war defending its slavery and states' rights, was never known to have a progressive spirit. Southern liberals stood out in contrast to the traditions of their region. But in spite of their exceptionalism in relation to their region, they reflected the same complicated racial dichotomy that had haunted the South since the first African-American slaves landed on its rich soil. In his classic work on the subject, *In Search of the Silent South* (1977), the historian of southern liberals Morton Sosna broadly defined white southern liberals as those

> who perceived that there was a serious maladjustment of race relations in the South, who recognized that the existing system resulted in grave injustices for blacks, and who either actively endorsed or engaged in program to aid Southern blacks in their fight against lynching, disfranchisement, segregation, and blatant discrimination in such areas as education, employment, and law enforcement.[3]

Southern liberals were thus different from most southerners in their acknowledgement that southern blacks did not fare well under the present racial and economic systems and that crucial changes were needed. Where they displayed diversity is in their views of what should be done, how it should be done, and how fast it should be implemented. Southern liberals could therefore be broadly divided in two further categories: the advanced liberals and the cautious liberals. [4]

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[2] When the historian of southern liberals, Morton Sosna, was first asked in graduate school whether he would include southern liberals in his dissertation about American liberals, he was surprised to learn that there were southern liberals to study. See Morton Sosna, In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), ix.

[3] Ibid., viii.

[4] Both terms are adopted from Anthony L. Newberry , Without Urgency or Ardor: The South's Middle-of-the-Road Liberals and Civil Rights, 1945-1950 (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1982), 19-21.

All southern liberals emphasized educational, economic, and social improvements. What set advanced liberals apart from most cautious liberals was their support for civil rights for all Americans, including the end of the segregation of the races, and their strong tie with national liberalism. There were variations within advanced liberalism of how fast desegregation should occur, but they were in general agreement that it should be on its way out. A hallmark of most of the advanced liberals was the influential role Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.) and his New Deal had on their development and their own staunch support for the president and his programs. The Swedish economist and sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, in his 1944 groundbreaking study of the South, noted that the "New Deal had made liberals accustomed to rather rapid reforms and…reforms which have often challenged local prejudices considerably."[5] Advanced liberals often advocated direct action by the federal government and southern activists. But they were distinct from the radical-left, especially the Communists, in that they did not advocate the replacement of the capitalist economic model or seek the overthrow of the United States government. Although they did not actively seek out the aid of fellow-travelers or Communist elements within the South, they were willing to work with them in order to achieve their goals. In many ways advanced liberals acted as a bridge between the cautious liberals and the more radical fringes. The Southern Conference for Human Welfare and its leaders, William Alexander, James Dombrowski, Virginia Durr, Clark Foreman, Lucy Randolph Mason, and Aubrey Williams, exemplified advanced southern liberalism.[6]

Cautious liberals, whose membership included the journalists Virginius Dabney, Ralph McGill, and John Temple Graves, and academics like Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson,

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[5] Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, Vol.1 (New York & London: Harper & Brother Publishers, 1944), 471.

[6] Henry Moon called liberals like Clark Foreman and Aubrey Williams the "advanced guard" of southern liberalism. See Henry Lee Moon, Balance of Power: The Negro Vote (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), 191.

shared the overall economic and social goals with advanced liberal counterpart, but what set them apart was their resistance to desegregation and their gradualist view of how progress should be made. These cautious liberals saw the race problem as only one of many symptoms exhibited by the economically ailing South. They reasoned that an overall rise in education and the standard of living in the South would automatically lessen the hardships suffered by southern blacks, and with time, an equal system of services could be created to fully accommodate the needs of southern blacks. These cautious liberals believed segregation was a part of the southern folkways—one that might die out naturally in decades or a century if everything else was improved—and a vice that needed to be accepted by all if any progress were to come to the South. Cautious liberals thus strove to live up to the ideal of "separate but equal." Their adherence to the southern mores, however, distanced them from the black segment that they wished to help. They were genuinely surprised when southern blacks rejected their enlightened paternalism and became increasingly militant in their demands for economic security and legal rights. Although most cautious liberals were initially optimistic about the New Deal, they grew to distrust the intruding presence of the federal government. They feared that ill-conceived legislation seeking to ameliorate the southern condition would stir the unpleasant memory of Reconstruction and adversely affect progress in the South. These cautious liberals were fully aware of the violent nature of their South and feared that Dixie's worst nature would manifest itself if the region were pushed too far by the federal government and African Americans. Changes, therefore, must be gradual and carefully planned, giving the southern people time to adjust to the new situation.[7]

[7] To many cautious liberals, the Reconstruction invoked the image of honorable and decent southerners suffering abuses at the hand of Radical Republicans and their ignorant black allies. Reconstruction, with its imposition of the national will on the sovereign states, stood as the absolute worst model for advancing the cause of the South and its black population. Even after the *Brown* decision had made school segregation illegal, cautious southern liberals like

Unfortunately, despite the works and accomplishments of southern liberals to institute racial and economic changes in the South during the pre-*Brown* era, their work has largely been overshadowed by the Civil Rights Movement and the profound impact it had on American society. What marred the reputation of southern liberals as a whole was the public advocacy of some of the most prominent cautious liberals who, fearing that the South was not ready for the rapid pace of progress, adopted a strict segregationist stance. Many African Americans, who saw their enormous sacrifices during World War II as their blood payment for freedom, were dismayed by the unexpected retreat of respected cautious liberals. Walter White, the President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), lamented in 1ate 1942 that "the highest casualty rate of the war to date seems to be that of Southern white liberals… [who are] fleeing before the onslaught of the professional Southern bigots."[8] The African-American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin denounced the record of white liberals as "a shameful record," shaped by those who, with a few exceptions, had "been unable to

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the influential journalist Gerald Johnson of the *Baltimore Evening Sun* held firm the conviction that it should be up to each state to desegregate at its own pace independent of the federal government or else the disastrous Reconstruction would repeat itself. Another highly influential cautious liberal southern journalist, Virginius Dabney of the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, identified southern liberalism in his book, *Liberalism in the South* (1932), with the Jeffersonian ideal of state rights. Sosna describes resistance toward federal attempts to improve southern race relations, with a few exceptions, as a quintessential characteristic of cautious southern liberals. These cautious southern liberals paradoxically believed that, in order for progress to succeed in the South, it needed to adhere strictly to southern traditions and mores. Anything else would automatically be branded as radical and a threat to the southern way of life. At the same time, however, cautious southern liberals demonstrated a confident optimism that the South was gradually becoming more progressive. In his book, Dabney insisted that there was "a growing awareness on the part of the dominant race that the Negro is not a serf or a helot, but a human being with legitimate aspirations…which are slowly being realized…[there is] a growing conviction [on the part of a] substantial body of Southerners" that Jim Crow laws were excessively severe. In the end, although southern liberals had one foot entrenched in the past, their other foot was lifting them toward an enlightened vision of the South's future. See John T Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 53; Vincent Fitzpatrick, Gerald W. Johnson: From Southern Liberal to National Conscience (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2002), 216; Virginius Dabney, Liberalism in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 2, 165-70, 254, 264; Dabney's quote is in Liberalism in the South, 427-28; Sosna, In Search, 6.

[8] Walter White, "Decline of Southern Liberals," Negro Digest 1, no.3 (January 1943): 42.

divest themselves of the whole concept of white supremacy."[9] Recent historians of southern liberals are equally critical of them in their studies, either for their strict gradualist position and tactics or the questionable impact they had on the South. "For all the words they wrote, petitions they signed, organizations they launched, and studies they contributed to public discussion," wrote one historian, "this generation of Southern liberals has been rather easy to dismiss."[10] The public, rightward retreat of cautious liberals cost them a leading position in the civil rights debate at a time when minority rights were advancing toward the forefront of American consciousness. Starting from the mid-1940s, African Americans would take it upon themselves to lead the Civil Rights Movement, with or without the help of southern liberals. The reputation of southern liberals never truly recovered from the conservative retreat of cautious liberals.

The damaged reputation of southern liberals in general has eclipsed the groundbreaking work of advanced liberals and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. These individuals defied the stereotype of gradualistic and paternalistic white southerners. Founded in 1938 by middle-class southern New Dealers as an extension of F.D.R.'s New Deal liberalism, the Southern Conference was the spiritual heir to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century progressive, populist spirit of direct activism and close involvement of the government in the positive development of the lives of its people. The Southern Conference, living up to its ideal of an organization of the people and for the people, opened its door to all comers, regardless of

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[9] James Baldwin and others, "Liberalism and the Negro: A Round-Table Discussion," Commentary 37, no.3 (March 1964): 41.

[10] The quote is from John Michael Matthews, "Virginius Dabney, John Temple Graves, and What Happened to Southern Liberalism," Mississippi Quarterly 45, no.4 (Fall 1992): 405. J. Douglas Smith, in Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenships in Jim Crow Virginia (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), argued that white Virginian moderates and cautious liberals sought to maintain their supremacy by obtaining "separation by consent" from black Virginians by making paternalistic promises of economic improvements, better educational facilities, and some legal protections in the courts as incentives. Anthony L. Newberry in his PhD dissertation, "Without Urgency or Ardor," similarly pointed out "the colossal act of self-deception" that moderates and cautious liberals were guilty of when they convinced themselves that southern blacks were conservative and generally content with their position as long as their economic situation improved, they were secured from the worst of white violence, and they could enjoy a truly equal but separate system of accommodations.

political stripes, and welcomed in Communists and socialists, CIO and AFL unions, blacks and whites. Their founding mission was to empower the poor and the disenfranchised of the South in order to create lasting economic and social changes. The Southern Conference not only worked on traditional liberal issues like abolishing the poll tax, expanding the economic and social programs of the New Deal, and unionizing the South, but it sought to build a working political coalition of progressive southerners to oust conservative Democrats from office and to end segregation at a time when southern conservative forces were at their strongest and an anti-segregationist stance was synonymous with communism. As Gunnar Myrdal noted, "The recruitment to liberalism in the South is strongly selective in regard to courage."[11] What made the men and women of the Southern Conference the epitome of advanced southern liberalism was their uncompromising adherence to the ideal of liberal-progressivism despite being viciously maligned as Communist and race traitors by southern conservative, reactionaries, and cautious liberals. The Southern Conference might have reversed the taint associated with southern liberalism and played a large role in the Civil Rights Movement had it not been for their untimely demise in 1948, an indirect result of the red-hysteria that was beginning to grip the entire nation. The Southern Conference's unwillingness to retreat from its progressive policy like the cautious liberals or to instigate witch-hunts marked it as a pariah within American liberalism and a perfect target for conservative Democrats. The end of the Southern Conference was a severe blow to advanced liberalism in the South. Its demise left behind a void that no other southern liberal organizations were able to fill.

The story of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare has been touched upon in debatable ways by Thomas Krueger in *And Promises to Keep* (1967) and Linda Reed in *Simple Decency and Common Sense* (1991). Both authors see the Southern Conference as a break from

[11] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 471.

the traditional cautious liberals and praised them for trying to make a difference. Krueger tells an informative story about the Southern Conference, but his story lacks depth as it does not provide adequate analysis of the characteristics of advanced liberalism. Reed judges the Southern Conference as too cautious and genteel. Advanced liberals of the SCHW, Reed argues, "wanted to remain respectable while also wanted to bring about fundamental economic social and political change in the South. The Civil Rights Movement showed that basic reform requires unseemly acts by masses of people—boycotts, demonstrating, jailings—which the SCHW…neither had the numbers nor the courage to undertake."[12] This thesis will argue against Reed's contention that the men and women of the Southern Conference were not courageous enough or did not try to build a mass movement against Jim Crow. This thesis will strive to show that the men and women of Southern Conference for Human Welfare took a courageous stand against Jim Crow, southern demagogues, and economic inequality at the cost of their own well-being. They stood in contrast to the image of wavering, cautious liberals at the onset of the Cold War. The Southern Conference failed not because it had compromised, but because it refused to give in at a time when it was convenient to do so. Its all-or-nothing defense of the liberal ideals, therefore, cost it vital funds to maintain its mass mobilization efforts. The story of the Southern Conference deserves to be examined again in the light of their courage and idealism.

[12] Linda Reed, Simple Decency & Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xxv.

Chapter 1: The Road to Birmingham

Joseph Gelders was a handsome man with a strong and sensitive face. His kind blue eyes drew others to him. But, as one close friend described Gelders, beneath his charming exterior were a fearless courage and a steely honesty. Born and raised in Red Mountain, a fashionable and predominantly Jewish neighborhood on the south side of Birmingham, Alabama, Gelder's sheltered world was one of comfort and easy living. His early placid existence belied the Herculean task he would undertake in his later life. After a brief stint in the army, a number of odd jobs, and a stay at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Gelders returned to the University of Alabama in 1929 and, within a short time, earned a B.S. and a Master's degree in physics. Gelders might have continued to live out his unexceptional and "unpolitical" life teaching physics at the University of Alabama had it not been for the Great Depression.[13]

[13] Virginia Foster Durr, interview by Bob Hall, Jacquelyn Hall, and Sue Thrasher, March 13-15, 1975, interview G-0023-2, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 63 (hereafter cited as Durr, interview, March 1975); Virginia Foster Durr, interview by Sue Thrasher, October 16, 1975, interview 0023-3, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 45 (hereafter cited as Durr, interview, October 1975); Thomas Krueger, And Promises to Keep: The Southern Conference for Human Welfare, 1938-1948 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 4.

The Great Depression brought millions of southern men and women to the brink of destitution. Gelders was utterly unprepared for the poverty surrounding him. For the first time in his life he witnessed a level of starvation and misery deplorable even by southern standards. The government, instead of distributing the agricultural surplus to the hungry, was killing livestock and leaving fertile land uncultivated in order to raise farm prices. Determined to find an answer to the misery that was draining the life of the southern people, Gelders devoured every economics book he could find. Starting with Adam Smith, he read all the economists until he finally got to the socialism of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. It was a Eureka moment. Gelders reasoned that the Depression was not one "of scarcity—it was a depression of glut." He blamed the unequal distribution of wealth for causing this catastrophic disaster. Believing that only revolutionary change could transform the entrenched system, Gelders converted to Marxism without ever having met a Marxist in his life.[14]

Gelders left the University of Alabama in August of 1935 to join the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, an organization labeled a Communist front. After a year working in New York, Gelders returned to Birmingham as the southern representative of the organization. Gelders's southerner status and family connections in Birmingham did not give him protection against violent treatment at the hands of strike breakers. While trying to end the inhumane imprisonment of Jack Barton, a secretary of a local Communist party, who was trying to organize a union at a local steel mill, Gelders was kidnapped on the night of September 23, 1936 while walking home from a meeting. Driving him over the mountain and into the woods, the men stripped him and proceeded to mercilessly beat him, kicking his stomach and whipping his back with a thick leather strap. Taking everything that Gelders had on him, the goons left him for dead. But he did not die. Naked, bloody, and severely injured, Gelders dragged his battered

[14]Durr, interview, Oct., 1975, 33-35.

body through the darkness of the Alabama hills to the nearest town for help. When Gelders died prematurely in 1950 at the age of 51, the autopsy discovered that his chest had been crushed into a mass of battered flesh and bone.[15]

The attack on Gelders was not unusual in the world of union busting. The South, despite its wealth of natural resources, had little to offer in term of human capital other than its abundant cheap labor. "We had such a low opinion of ourselves in those days" the progressive activist Virginia Durr recalled, "[Southern industrialists] think that they have to knuckle under to the North and tempt them with cheap labor." And to hold on to their advantage, southern industrialists did not hesitate to employ thugs and gave them free reign to maintain "law and order" on and off the factory floor. Violent intimidations were employed against attempts of unionization. The legal immunity enjoyed by these "special guards" rivaled that of the lynch mob. Despite Gelders's positive identification of two of his three assailants and an independent eyewitness account, none of the assailants were ever brought to trial. Instead of being discouraged, Gelders refused to cower. He realized, however, that the South could not be changed by anyone single agency or individual. Before it could improve economically and socially, a systematic revolution was necessary to protect the civil liberty of all southerners. [16]

In early 1938, Gelders shared his idea of a southern conference for civil liberties with the famous southern labor activist, Lucy Randolph Mason. After President Franklin Roosevelt's disastrous attempt to pack the Supreme Court in 1937, Lucy Mason, a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, advised the first lady that poor southerners, despite the fact that their leaders openly opposed the President, were the natural and strongest base for F.D.R. in the South. In order to create a more progressive South, these poor Southerners needed to be enfranchised. Deterrences

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[15] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 5; Durr, interview, Oct. 16, 1975, 38; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 3-6.
[16] Durr, interview, Mar. 13-15, 1975, 59, 66-67; Jerold S. Auerbach, "The La Follette Committee: Labor and Civil Liberties in the New Deal," The Journal of American History 51, no. 3 (1964): 435-459.

like the poll-tax needed to be eliminated.[17] Sensing potential in Gelders's proposal, Lucy Mason recommended him to Mrs. Roosevelt, and the First Lady was, in turn, impressed enough by Gelders's idea to arrange a meeting between him and her husband. The President was receptive to the idea of a southern conference and a possible campaign to repeal of the poll tax, but he asked Gelders to broaden the agenda to include economic reforms. With the President giving his approval of the project, Gelders and Miss Mason began to recruit conferees from the most logical and accessible source: southern New Dealers, and among them was Clark Foreman who would later have the most profound impact on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.[18]

Clark Howell Foreman was born in 1902 in Atlanta, Georgia, to a distinguished family. His maternal grandfather, Evan Howell, was the founder and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*. His early life was typical of the genteel southern middle class. What shocked Foreman into awareness of the plight of southern blacks was the outbreak of racial violence in 1919. Foreman was in his second year at the University of Georgia when he witnessed for the first the time the age-old southern tradition of lynching. The victim, like four-fifth of victims of such gruesome deaths, was a black man. The image of the man dangling from the tree while being slowly roasted alive by the fire beneath his feet haunted Foreman's memory for the rest of his life. The mob, not content to let their victim suffer in fiery agony, cut him down and proceeded to beat savagely him with their crude instruments before returning him to the fire. Foreman was shocked to learn that the black victim was not hauled from his home or picked up from a dingy sheriff jail, but was taken from a "mob-proof courthouse." Foreman realized then that there was no such thing as law and order in Dixie—nothing was safe from the murderous

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[17] Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 62.

[18] Clark Foreman, "The Decade of Hope," Phylon 12, no.2 (1951): 138; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 16-17; Durr, interview, Mar., 1975, 80; William Leuchtenburg, The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 112.

hands of a lynching mob. The Atlanta papers vehemently denounced the barbarous act. The professors of the university loudly condemned the baser element of their society in front of their classes. But none of the better elements would raise a finger to stop the crime or to prosecute the perpetrators. These intellectuals preferred to express their outrage and indignation in the safe confines of the university or on the pages of the newspaper where no illiterate mob could touch them.[19]

The intense experience transformed Foreman. His faith in the South and God was shaken to the core. In his later life, Foreman would describe himself as "an agnostic who believes firmly in the Bill of Rights." To Foreman, no heavenly power nor any southern agent could stand against the raw emotion he witnessed that day. The impetus for change would have to come from above the Mason-Dixon Line. And, so, soon after graduation, Foreman left the South and went to Harvard University and then the London School of Economics. While in London, Foreman discovered J. H. Oldham's *Christianity and the Race Problem* (1924). The book was a revelation to him. In it he learned about the Atlanta-based Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), an organization founded in Atlanta, Georgia, as a response to the rising number of black lynchings and race riots during the bloody summer of 1919. The Commission professed to bring the two races together to solve the race problems of the South. Inspired by the Commission's goal, Foreman returned to Atlanta, ready to throw himself into interracial work.[20]

Foreman's energy and devotion would later become legendary. Will Alexander, one of the founders of the Interracial Commission, later described Foreman as a "Billy-goat" whose way of getting thing done was to butt right into obstacles and keep butting until he was through

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[19] Clark Foreman, interview by Jacquelyn Hall and Bill Finger, November 16, 1974, interview B-0003, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 1-3. (Hereafter cited as Foreman, interview, page number).

[20] Foreman, interview, 75

with the problems.[21] Unlike many professed enlightened whites who lent only their sympathetic ears to blacks confessing their hardship, Foreman was pure act when it came to doing the right thing. Regardless of the scale of the problem, Foreman showed little hesitation in confronting injustice. ".If [Clark Foreman] had waked [sic] up some night in a nightmare dreaming that he was not a liberal or had done some illiberal thing," Alexander recalled, "he probably wouldn't have slept again for a month. He leaned over backwards to be on the liberal side."[22] Unfortunately, despite early optimism, Foreman would later find out that the cautious Commission was not liberal enough for him. Founded to resolve an immediate crisis, the Interracial Commission represented the quintessential enlightened paternalistic attitude of cautious liberalism.[23]

After the end of World War I in 1918, the patriotic good will displayed between the races during the war evaporated as the post-war recession hit the nation's economy. Economically frustrated, poor southern whites took their anger out on poor southern blacks. Fueling the flame of violence were the rumors that the returning black veterans were planning to use what they had learned in the army to stage violent insurrections against their white neighbors. In order to calm rumors of racial violence and to prevent barbarous lynchings, the Methodist minister Will Alexander assembled a group of ministers, bankers, and educators of both races to discuss the situation in Atlanta, Georgia in 1919. Traditionally, contacts between the southern blacks and whites were closest at the bottom of the social and economic level; the next level of interaction was between black servants and their white employers; and as one moved up the economic ladder, the level of interaction between the two races decreased dramatically. But Alexander

[21] The Reminiscences of Will W. Alexander, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, NY, 370-71. (Hereafter cited as Reminiscences of Alexander.)
[22] Reminiscences of Alexander, 370.
[23] Foreman, interview, 7-8.

found out that once a line of communication between the two races was established, rumors could be tamed and violence prevented by the words of the better class. The positive results convinced the wealthy and educated segments of both races that an organization designed to foster communication between the two races would be beneficial to deter future misunderstanding and violence and to educate southern whites on the horrors of racial abuse suffered by southern blacks.[24]

Foreman's first two years at the Interracial Commission were spent trying to get influential and wealthy whites to take pity on destitute blacks in their midst. Foreman was astounded by the condescending paternalistic attitude displayed by whites at the meeting. At the local branches of the CIC, it was the "civilized minority"—white, educated, middle-class southerners living in urban areas—who set the agenda. The organization had few rural, land-owning members in its fold—the group that ultimately controlled the survival of the vast majority of southern blacks, who were overwhelmingly tenant farmers. White leaders would get together to hear complaints and grievances from leaders of the black community and dispense favors whenever they felt necessary. Some decrepit streets running through black neighborhoods were paved and some deteriorating black facilities were upgraded, but the fundamental instruments of oppression were left in place. This "civilized minority" naively believed that if the "better class" treated their blacks as "Christian brothers," then low-class whites would learn from them. The problem, many within the Interracial Commission believed, would yield to the inspiring intrusion of paternalistic virtue.[25]

The Basis of Racial Adjustment (1925), a college-text book published by the Interracial Commission to educate southern white college students on race relationships, exemplified

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[24] Reminiscences of Will Alexander, 156, 174, 176-78, 183; Sosna, In Search, 21-23.
[25] Sullivan, Days of Hope, 32; Sosna, In Search, 27, 28, 30, 34.

cautious liberalism. In it, the author and research director of the Interracial Commission, Thomas Woofter, identified three groups who made race relationships difficult: the ignorant and condescending Yankees, the bigoted Southerners, and the militant Negroes who demanded too much, too quickly. Woofter pointed out that agitation, whether it was stirred up by the forces of reactionaries or by militant blacks, would inevitably impede racial progress. Although he blamed the southern press for sensationalizing and magnifying the crimes of a few blacks, Woofter also faulted the black press for its unnecessary militant tone. Minor incidents that resulted from the foolish actions of both races should be conscientiously ignored by both races in order to prevent unnecessary riots and lynchings. The CIC should speak out in a moderate tone and with the clear force of reason behind it against atrocities like lynching. The CIC's goal was to forge a cautious path of improvements.[26]

Many of the Interracial Commission's casual members were not gravely concerned about the civil rights of blacks, nor did they hold an altogether altruistic view of blacks. Conservative members wanted the CIC to help slow the tide of racial violence and prevent federal intervention. Conservatives even passively resisted efforts to gain voting rights for poor blacks and whites. The liberal Will Alexander defended the CIC's inaction by pointing out the other important programs that were preoccupying the Interracial Commission's energy at the time.[27] The University of North Carolina sociologist and a member of the Interracial Commission, Guy B. Johnson, however, saw it differently, "I went through a sort of cynical, skeptical period, in which I think that…all of these activities that most organizations carried on were really rather trivial and had very little to do with the achieving of their announced goals…but that they had a lot to do with the personal functions. That is, what they did for the members who were taking

[26] Thomas Woofter, The Basis of Racial Adjustment (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1925), 5, 23-25, 241-45.
[27] Morton Sosna, In Search, 32; John T. Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 65-67; Reminiscences of Will Alexander, 258.

part."[28] The Interracial Commission gave those conservative white southern members a patronizing feeling of empowerment. Olive Stone, a member of the Quaker interracial Swarthmore Institute, marveled at the "patronizing approach on the part of the whites and the ingratiating appeal from the Negroes. Negroes… [who were] bursting with a smoldering sense of injustice and the ease of conscience…which the whites get from their benevolent gestures."[29] Therefore, instead of establishing a foundation for future progress or creating meaningful dialogues, the cautious liberals and the conservatives of Interracial Commission "developed the tactics of evading principles; of being very indirect in attacking problems; of cajoling, coaxing and luring the public into giving in on minor issues ."[30]

By 1926, two years into his tenure with the Interracial Commission, Clark Foreman decided that the Interracial Commission could neither continue to function on a basis of pure philanthropy nor could it depend on its powers of persuasion to convince southern whites to change. The progress of the CIC was insignificant when compared to the job that needed to be done. The CIC was passively treating the symptoms and were not getting to the roots of the disease.[31] Will Alexander, in his later years, admitted that at the establishment of the Interracial Commission he "had no philosophy about the ultimate solution of the race problem."[32] Guy Johnson judged the Interracial Commission less harshly. He contended that the Interracial Commission had managed to do some good for blacks in certain instances, but problems like poverty, black employment, equal education, and the isolation of the races, were simply beyond

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[28] Guy B. Johnson , interview with Jacquelyn Hall, December 16, 1974, interview B-0006, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 16. (Hereafter cited as Johnson, interview, page number).
[29]Glenda Gilmore, Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of the Civil Rights, 1919-1950 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 203, 221-22.
[30] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 470.
[31] Foreman, interview, 10-12
[32] Reminiscences of Will Alexander, 182

the meager resources of the Commission.[33] Foreman, depleted and disillusioned by the glacial pace of progress, heeded W.E.B. Du Bois's call for political activism and once again headed north to find new inspiration.

The timing for Foreman was perfect. 1929 saw the worst economic collapse the country had ever experienced. The specter of violent revolution haunted the nation as hunger, unemployment, and despair mounted. The Depression spared no corner of the country, but nowhere did the economic downturn hit harder than the rural South. Economic depression meant plummeting prices of cotton, the main source of income for the majority of southerners. The infamous angry battle cries of "No Jobs for Niggers until Every White Man Has a Job!" and "Niggers, back to the cotton fields—city jobs are for white folks," were on the lips of thousands of hungry and desperate whites.[34] Frustrated and helpless, the white tenant farmers and urban workers inflicted their wrath on the black tenant farmers. Lynching doubled in 1930 from1929 numbers.[35] As the deepening Great Depression sucked dry the paltry coffers of the southern states, Dixie's legendary xenophobic temperament buckled for the first time since the Reconstruction. The promise of a New Deal delivered with a supremely comforting voice and an optimistic smile of the ever-charming Franklin Delano Roosevelt was enough to captivate the South and caused it to seek salvation in the self-declared "part-time" southerner.[36]

After F.D.R.'s resounding victory over Herbert Hoover in 1932, many southern liberals flocked to Washington D.C. to work on the promised New Deal. Sensing that the nation was entering a new age of progress, many of them believed that with careful management and the resources of the federal government, the South would finally realize its great latent economic

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[33] Johnson, interview, 17-18.
[34]Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergency of Civil Rights as a National Issue, Volume 1: The Depression Decade (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 34-36
[35] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 77-78.
[36] Morton, In Search, 73; Leuchtenburg, The White House, 33.

potential. Southern liberals had long anticipated the role they would play in the transformation of the South. Southern liberal journalists predicted that the Democratic Party would become the engine of progressive and liberal ideologies. The Democratic Party, with its long history of populism and standing up for the "little man," was the only alternative to the Republicans who, southern liberals firmly believed, were all for the wealthy and the privileged. The solid Democratic South, they imagined, would be the vanguard of prosperity and change. The cautiously liberal Virginius Dabney quipped that this seemingly cataclysmic event would be "an almost unexampled opportunity for Southern Liberalism to reassert itself as a vital force in our national life. By furnishing an adequate answer to some of the principal questions raised by the existing economic distress, Southern statesmanship can establish itself once more as a controlling factor in the national councils."[37] Another liberal southern editor, Hodding Carter of the *Delta Democrat-Times*, expressed best the feeling of many southern liberals when he praised the New Deal as "the Second American Revolution. Truly, it is a privilege to live through such times as these."[38] As these southerners looked northward with hope, President Roosevelt, too, saw that the only way to improve the South was to liberalize it. The President openly recruited young southern liberals to his administration, grooming them to replace the old southern guards. Indeed, many southern liberals would be elected to Congress for the first time on the long coattail of the New Deal. Others would contribute by working within the "alphabet soup" of the New Deal's administrations and agencies.[39]

In the middle of 1933, with the Rosenwald Fund funding his salary and the help of Will Alexander, Clark Foreman secured a role as an adviser to Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the

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[37] Virginius Dabney, Liberalism in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 423-25.
[38] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 44, 118.
[39] Tony Badger, "Closet Moderates: Why Liberals Failed, 1940-1970" in Ted Ownby, ed., The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 87; Leuchtenburg, The White House, 79

Interior, on the economic status of blacks. Foreman's task was to make sure that African Americans got their fair share of New Deal benefits. Immediately, Foreman's appointment was met with protest from W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP. Despite his liberal credential, Foreman was still a Georgian and a first cousin to the conservative publisher of the Atlanta *Constitution*. Foreman, himself, felt that his job should go to an African American, but he would accept the post on the condition that he could hire the Harvard-trained economist Robert Weaver as his assistant and whom he would groom to succeed him. Foreman's liberalism went beyond just having a black assistant; he went out of his way to break the many racial taboos of Washington. He hired one of the first black secretaries to work in the federal government, Lucia Pitts, which prompted malicious gossip of miscegenation. To the great consternation of other federal employees, Foreman integrated the cafeteria at the federal building where he worked with his black staff. Ignoring the complaints of local project managers of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Foreman hired highly qualified but unemployed blacks in semi-managerial or other skilled positions. For his progressive efforts, the unapologetic rabid racist Eugene Talmadge, the governor of Foreman's home state of Georgia, denounced Foreman on the radio for mongrelizing the races. But Clark Foreman was resolute. "Fear was the tool of reaction," Foreman concluded from his experience, "person who wanted to fight for decent conditions for all human beings had to make up his mind that he would not be frightened away from a position he knew to be correct."[40] Courage would be a quintessential characteristic of the advanced liberals.

In order to further his intent to liberalize the South and eliminate opposition to reforms, President Roosevelt decided to press for the defeat of conservative southern senators seeking re-

[40] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 139.; "Disapprove White Adviser for Race," Chicago Defender, September 2, 1933; "A Step in the Wrong Direction," CD, September 16, 1933; Foreman , interview, 23-24; John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 92; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 54.

election in 1938. After the early flurry of activities that created the New Deal, the united conservative blocs in Congress refused to further any of F.D.R.'s agenda throughout the winter of 1937-1938. One of President's first purge targets was the Senator Walter George of Georgia. F.D.R. asked Foreman if he knew any Georgian who could make a viable candidate against Walter George. Foreman had little experience in politics of Georgia and could not suggest any worthy candidate, but he quickly seized upon the opportunity to propose to the President an idea he had picked up during a Washington meeting of the Southern Policy Committee. Foreman recommended that a pamphlet be published to educate southerners about the numerous economic benefits the South had reaped from the New Deal. F.D.R. recognized the pamphlet could be a potential weapon against his conservative opponents. But instead of listing the accomplishments of the New Deal, the President wanted the pamphlet to detail the economic ills of the South so that when the southerners see the facts, they would find their own answers. Sensitive to the pride of southerners and their resentment of outside criticism, the authors of the project were mostly made up of southern New Dealers and distinguished southerners like the President of the University of North Carolina, Frank Potter Graham.[41] In his letter to conferees, F.D.R. famously declared, "It is my conviction that the South presents right now the nation's No. 1 economic problem—the nation's problem, not merely the South's."[42] After studying the finding, the committee of southerners sadly agreed with the President's assessment that the South represented the "Nation's No. 1 economic problem." [43]

The *Report on the Economic Conditions of the South*, officially released in August 1938, was a condensed list of all that was wrong with the South economically, agriculturally,

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[41] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 11-13; Felix Belair, Jr., "Roosevelt Tours Warm Springs," New York Times, March 15, 1938 ; Felix Belair, Jr., "Roosevelt Urged to Attack George," NYT, August 9, 1938; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 140; Leuchtenburg, The White House, 84-84, 102-03; Durr, interview, March 1975, 69-73.
[42] Louis Starks, "South is Declared 'No.1' by President in Economic Need," NYT, July 6, 1938: 1.
[43] Warren Ashby, Frank Porter Graham: A Southern Liberal (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1980), 151.

educationally, and financially. The South, by all economic rationale, was a colony of the United States. The South, "while it is blessed by Nature with immense wealth, its people as a whole are the poorest in the country….the South has been forced to trade the richness of its soil, its mineral, and forest, and the labor of its people for goods manufactured elsewhere."[44] Despite its unflattering portrayal of the South's economic conditions, the *Report* did not put the blame on the South, but on the northern corporations that had exploited the region's natural and human resources.

Although the blunt honesty of the *Report* surprised and irked many, the content of the report itself was nothing revolutionary. The data had long ago been collected by the sociologist Howard Washington Odum and his team of social scientists, and had been available in Odum's magnum opus, *The Southern Region*, since 1935. Foreman readily admitted that the report "wasn't a new thing. It was the prevailing attitude and had been for some time. What we were doing was bolstering that by putting the figures together [and] putting the story together in that pamphlet."[45] The outline of the pamphlet was leaked to the press and soon appeared in the *New York Times* and then later in the rest of the southern papers.[46]

Immediately after its release, the *Report* had a life of its own, galvanizing many different segments of the South. Even before the actual release of the pamphlet, southern politicians were split in their opinions of the central tenet of the *Report*—the South being the nation's number one economic problem. Eleven of the twenty-three southern governors and senators surveyed agreed that the South held the unenviable accolade, and while no one went out and flatly condemned the President's claim, Senator Bailey of North Carolina replied with the typical defensive response,

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[44] The entire pamphlet was reprinted in "Gloomy Picture Is Drawn of South's Condition by National Emergency Council," NYT, August 13, 1938.
[45] Foreman, interview, 41-42.
[46] Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 233-34.

"The South has advanced much in the last seventy-five years," and the credits belonged to the "forefathers who rebuilt the South after the Civil War."[47] Southern Anti-New Dealers, similarly, resented the unflattering designation and were suspicious of the implication of federal interference. But for liberal southerners the NEC's *Report* became a "kind of Bible."[48] One of the leading authorities on the era, the historian William Leuchtenburg, credited the report with helping found the "most important organization of southern liberals that had ever been created," the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.[49] The Southern Conference would, according to Foreman, merge the Congress of Industrial Organization unions with the liberal southern New Dealers to form a new southern coalition, one that would bring southern liberal activists onto the national stage for the first time.[50]

After receiving the blessing of President Roosevelt to host a southern conference, Joseph Gelders and Lucy Mason approached Virginia Durr, sister-in-law of the former senator of Alabama and new Supreme Court and Justice Hugo Black, to get Black interested in a conference in his home state. Not wanting to play the intermediary, she suggested them to ask him themselves. But Durr also recommended Gelders to Clark Foreman and the rest of the Southern Policy Committee. The Southern Policy Committee was a group of young, liberal southern intellectuals, politicians and New Deal bureaucrats who met once a month for dinner and serious discussion of New Deal policy. As with any group of energized and idealistic young men, members of the Policy Committee had grand ambitions for the South and the role their organization would play in its transformation.[51] Members of the SPC hoped their organization

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[47] "Southerners Split Over New Deal Aid," NYT, July 10, 1938; John Temple Graves, "The South is Critical of the NEC Report," NYT, August 21, 1938.
[48]Sullivan, Days of Hope, 66-67.
[49] Leuchtenburg, The White House, 110-12.
[50] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 137.
[51]Durr , interview, March 1975, 66, 79-80; Durr , interview, October 1975, 47-48; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 63; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 139.

would be, in the words of one historian, the "arbiter of political legitimacy in the South."[52] Gelders's conference needed the backing of bona fide and influential New Dealers and now he had access to them. Indeed, H.C. Nixon, the chairman of the SPC, had extensive contacts with prominent businessmen, industrialists, labor leaders, and educators and did not disappoint. The support of the members of the SPC ensured the conference would be very well attended. The determined supplicant wanted a broad representation of southern institutions in his new conference and he would not decline support from any segment.[53]

No group, however, would be more important to Gelders and the subsequent survival of the Southern Conference than the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Founded in 1935 as a challenger to the craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL), the CIO's mission was to unionize low-skilled and low-wage workers who were traditionally ignored by the AFL. The CIO recognized early on that the South, with a labor force of 14 million, the vast majority of whom were unorganized, represented the most tempting frontier for unionism. "The organization of the workers of the South," read a unanimously passed 1941 resolution, "is the no. 1 task before the CIO."[54] The CIO also had good reasons to fear an un-unionized South. With wages pitifully low in the South and the politics corrupt, industries could easily transfer their production to the South and be rid of unions' demands. The CIO's efforts elsewhere in the country could be jeopardized if they lost the South.

Unfortunately, the question of race challenged the CIO's hope for the South. The South's devotion to keeping its races apart posed a serious challenge to the CIO's egalitarian model. Early southern unions were mostly limited to southern whites. Employers exploited this

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[52] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 144.
[53] George B Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 592-93; Reed, Simple Decency, 11-12.
[54] Robert H. Zieger, The CIO, 1935-1955 (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 228-30.

weakness to their great advantage by employing poor black workers as strike-breakers. In order to make the South more hospitable to labor unions, the CIO decided to focus its energy on financing southern organizations to make the South friendly toward unionism and interracial cooperation. The two of most important beneficiaries of the CIO were the progressive Highlander Folk School of Tennessee and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. The powerful head of the United Mine Workers, John Lewis, seeing potential in Gelders's proposal, agreed to provide the subsidy and the manpower to make the conference a reality.[55]

After a publicity campaign, extensive coalition building, and two preliminary planning meetings in July and September, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare finally took place in Birmingham on Sunday, November 20, 1938. The selection of Birmingham as the first meeting place of the SCHW had a great symbolic significance. Birmingham, a city "born but yesterday, but already a mighty forge," was not more than seventy-five years old by the time of the conference.[56] The town had experienced a population explosion as new industries like steel, iron, and coal drew workers from all across the state. Nevertheless, despite the city's dramatic growth, wealth was not distributed equitably and the town became a hotbed of unionist and Communist activities. In 1934, Birmingham witnessed a violent strike of black U.S. Steel ore miners. Fists and bombs were exchanged, strikers and strikebreakers were murdered, and homes of the black scabs were destroyed. By the time of the Conference, there were over 4,000 unemployed workers with no relief funds. The city of Birmingham symbolized the modern South at a crossroads—so much potential and yet so many challenges to confront.[57]

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[55] Sosna, In Search, 76-78; John M. Glen, Highlander: No Ordinary School, 2nd edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 2, 58; Diane McWhorter, Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 46-47

[56] Wilbur Cash, Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962, copyrighted 1940), 194.

[57] McWhorter, Carry Me Home, 42.

On November 20, 1938, 1200 to 1500 delegates of both races and from all across the South—representing labor organizations, churches, southern politicians, educators, New Deal bureaucrats, and civic clubs—poured "into Birmingham like a cleansing flood, animated one and all with one selfless purpose—to help the South thru the democratic process of free speech and frank discussion."[58] It was a gathering of who's who of southern liberalism. Famous academics included the highly revered Frank Potter Graham of UNC, the young historian C. Vann Woodward and the eminent sociologist Charles S. Johnson of Fisk University; New Dealers included the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, Governor Bibb Graves of Alabama, and Aubrey Williams of the Works Progress Administration; prominent journalists and publishers included John Temple Graves of the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, and Mark Ethridge and Barry Bingham of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Mingling with these giants of southern liberalism were sharecroppers of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the steelworkers of the mills. The one dollar fee, made possible by the subsidy of the CIO, made the conference affordable for those of modest means. In one of the rare moments of unity in southern history, the illiterate day laborers and the ivory tower intellects shared the same stage and the same dream, to guide the South toward an equitable and prosperous future.[59]

Despite the conference's theme of improving the South, the region's sensitivity to criticism, especially from outsiders, made it necessary to require that only true southerners be voting delegates. All non-southern visitors were welcome to attend, but only as guests. The conference, however, opened its doors wide to people of both races. The conference became the first integrated meeting of its kind ever to be held publicly in the South. Delegates of both races

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[58] Kenneth Douty, "Report on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare" [c.1956] Reports and Letters #3976, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, 18 (hereafter cited as Douty, "Southern Conference Report").

[59] McWhorter, Carry Me Home, 40-42, 49; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 6, 14; Egerton, Speak Now, 182-84.

could sit anywhere without restrictions. Black delegates proudly walked through the front doors of the auditorium and ignored the "Colored" entrances. Prior interracial organizations like the Southern Tenant Farmers Union or the Commission on Interracial Cooperation had to keep their meeting private and with little publicity in order to avoid the unwelcome, intrusive, and critical eyes of Jim Crow.[60] In contrast, the spirit of openness and the promise of a new progressive age in the South combined to make the event a cathartic experience for many southern liberals. Cherished of dreams and pent up hopes were released. "It was a love feast," Virginia Durr recounted, "[We] had a lot of preaching and praying, singing…the whole meeting was just full of love and hope. The new day had come; the whole South was coming together to make a new day."[61] The Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, who was present at the conference, added, "[I] had a feeling that the real importance of this meeting was that here for the first time in the history of the region, since the era of the American revolution, the lonely Southern liberals met in great numbers… and that they, in this new and unique adventure, experienced a foretaste of the freedom and power which large-scale political organization and concerted action give."[62] The presence of Mrs. Roosevelt and the letter of greeting from President Roosevelt added legitimacy and prestige to the meeting. Southern liberals saw this as the long awaited golden opportunity they had wished for— to be able to organize and tackle the South's numerous problems collectively. Following the outline laid out by the *Report on the Economic Conditions of the South*, the conferees discussed a broad and ambitious range of economic topics concerning the South: the need for more federal housing, fixing the freight rates, funding for vocational training, repeal of the poll tax, and promotion of land ownership. Their social issues ranged from adding more playgrounds for black children to having a women's bureau in every state labor

[60] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 139; Sosna, In Search, 94.
[61] Durr, interview, October 1975, 49-50.
[62] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 469

department.[63] Concluding the inaugural evening, Frank Graham summed up the conference's progressive mission in his moving keynote address by calling for brotherhood between the races:

> This is their home. White and black have joined hands here to go forward by way of interracial cooperation toward the Kingdom of God…. Let us [southerners] prove at this Southern Conference for Human Welfare that we stand for the more helpless minorities and underprivileged….Let us show that this Conference stands for the Sermon on the Mount, the American Bill of Rights and American Democracy.[64]

After their first exciting and uplifting night, the jubilant conferees left the auditorium and returned to their hotel rooms in high hope.

On the following day the whole auditorium was besieged by police vans and policemen "on all four sides…inside and out."[65] Where the previous night promised a new age in the South, the morning sternly reminded the conferees that the present South would not go away without a struggle. The police commissioner of Birmingham, Eugene "Bull" Connor, made full use of his "bullfrog" voice to announce his presence, "I ain't gonna let no darkies and white folk segregate together in this town."[66] He demanded the conferees to immediate comply with Alabama law and segregate themselves for the duration of the conference. Despite an arrangement made with municipal authorities for the freedom of seating, Connor refused to budge from his position. Black members were visibly upset. Some of them left the meeting when the call for segregation was made by the liberal Judge Louise Charlton, who was presiding over the conference, "We didn't make the law, and until it is changed we must obey it."[67] A great debate then ensued as to whether each races could sit together on the stage. Connor, content that he had imposed his will, allowed the two races to occupy a side of the auditorium instead of having black members move

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[63] Winifred Mallon, "Sweeping Moves Urged to Aid South," NYT, 23Nov., 1938: 23; Reed, Simple Decency, 14-15; Anthony Dunbar. Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 190.
[64] Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 156.
[65] Durr, interview, October 1975, 50-51.
[66] Leuchtenburg, The White House, 114.
[67] Frank A. Young, "Southern Whites Flay Jim Crow Laws in Open Meeting," CD, December 3, 1938.

to the back or the balcony and blacks and whites could occupy the stage together for convenience's sake. Mrs. Roosevelt, refusing to be Jim Crowed by Bull Connor, borrowed a ruler to measure the distance between the black and white sides and placed her chair right in the middle of the aisle between the two segregated sections. Not wanting to arrest the First Lady, Connor and his deputy ignored the violation of Alabama law. The First Lady defiantly held on to her little folding chair and carried it with her wherever she went.[68]

Prior to Bull Connor's interference, the Southern Conference had no intention of challenging segregation outside its own meetings. Although Gelders had initially wanted to make civil rights the primary focus of the conference, he was forced to compromise when he tried to assemble a vast coalition of southerners whose numerous agendas and vary political leanings did not correlate well with the singular focus on civil rights. Connor's segregation of the meeting forced the members of the conference to confront the inescapable Jim Crow and the challenge it would pose to their efforts to reform the South. In a resolution the conferees simply referred to the incident as a "situation we condemn" and urged the board that future meetings be held at a non-segregated locations. Unfortunately for the Southern Conference, the resolution was grossly misquoted by newspapers all across the country and was seriously misunderstood in the South.[69] The *New York Times* misleadingly declared that the unanimously passed resolution was a "Condemnation of the South's 'Jim Crow' laws…."[70] The prominent black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, went ever further, writing that the SCHW had "struck the first blow against the old conservative South by declaring…it was opposed to racial discrimination in any form. Its

[68] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 141; Durr, interview, March 1975, 83-84; Modjeska Simkins, interview with John Egerton, May 11, 1990, interview A-0356,transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 22.
[69] Reed, Simple Decency, 17; Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 157.
[70] Winfred Mallon, "Black Hails Gain in Rights in South," NYT, 24 Nov., 1938, 33.

program disagrees in all particulars with the 'Old White South,' on the Negro question."[71] Serious damage was done to the Southern Conference's standing within the white South. Southern newspapers that initially supported of the Conference's forward looking mission now turned against it. The *Montgomery Advertiser*, which had expressed high hopes for the Southern Conference, now "peremptorily and emphatically replies that as far as it is concerned, it does not give a hoot whether there is another such conference either in southern Jim-crow towns or New England towns during the life of this generation."[72] The *Alabama Journal* denounced the Southern Conference as a "gathering of radicals, government employees and irresponsibles [sic] [that] is far from being representative of southern thought on anything."[73] Even the liberal Jonathan Daniels of the Raleigh *News and Observers*, who had once promised to serve on the board of the Southern Conference, penned his disappointment of the conference for its unwise "condemnation of the South's laws…[because it] placed emphasis upon the one thing certain to angrily divide the South."[74] Southern politicians attending the meeting hastily followed the newspapers' examples and denounced the Conference's resolution against segregation and reiterated their loyal support for Jim Crow.[75]

On the other hand, becaues of the backlash from the conservative southern press and the suspicion of Communist influence, the Southern Conference instantly gained credibility with northern liberals and the African-American press. Writing in *Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP, Charles Johnson praised the Conference as "the first bold emergence of the liberal South as a self-conscious group…" The Conference was the first interracial organization to

[71] Lucius Harper, "Dustin'—of the—News," CD, December 10, 1938.
[72] Frank A. Young, "Southern Whites Flay Jim Crow Laws in Open Meeting," CD, December 3, 1938.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Charles W. Eagles, Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations: The Evolution of a Southern Liberal (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 72.
[75] "Bankhead Backs Racial Laws," NYT, December 1, 1938.

achieve "a comfortable tolerance in diversity."[76] The controversy also reduced number of conservative or moderates. The remaining members of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare were among the most progressive in the South.

In spite of the embarrassing ordeal with "Bull" Connor, the loss of support from most of the southern media and the diminished enthusiasm from the conservative supporters, the progressive and liberal supporters of the Southern Conference remained largely optimistic about the Southern Conference's future. They saw the creation of the Southern Conference as heralding a new and fundamental shift in the thinking of the southern liberals, one of the few times in the South's history that the "fringe" groups of southern liberalism openly joined together to create a progressive movement. Gunnar Myrdal viewed the Southern Conference as the first attempt by native southerners at practical and planned social engineering. Unlike previous participants of interracial organizations like the CIC, the New Dealers that made up the Southern Conference were experienced operators of politics and planning agencies. The leaders of the left- wing differed from the cautious liberals and moderates in that they felt little divided loyalty over the future of the South. Many of these progressive southern liberals had been educated in the elite universities of the northeast, others had traveled all across Europe including visits to the Soviet Union, and some had worked for the New Deal or organized for unions. Their common experience of spending an extensive amount of time outside of the South meant that the solutions that they would look for would be outside of the South. They saw themselves as part of a national liberal movement rather than just as provincial "southern liberals." The loss of conservative members and the ire of the conservative southern press did not bother these new progressive southern liberals, as they would traditional interracialists, but actually enhanced their

[76] Charles Johnson, "More Southerners Discover the South," Crisis 46 (January 1939): 14-15.

progressive agenda.[77] Virginia Durr, who had attended the conference as a representative of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, openly and optimistically embraced this new and more empowering branch of southern liberalism, "We had an absolute faith in our own government in those days, at least our Roosevelt administration. There was Mrs. Roosevelt working for us and Mr. Roosevelt working for us….It was just heaven to be young…We had the White House behind us; we had the government behind us…So we really were riding high, wide, and handsome."[78] Clark Foreman, too, saw a promising future ahead for the Southern Conference, identifying it as the "peak of the New Deal" and an "outgrowth of the efforts of President Roosevelt to help the people of the South…"[79] Myles Horton, a representative of the Highland Folk School, optimistically believed that the SCHW could attract support from both the union and southern white-middle class and yet still maintain a progressive position on segregation.[80]

While some members of the Southern Conference who were also members of the older Interracial Commissions saw the SCHW as a more active and vigorous extension of the decaying Commission, others looked at the Southern Conference as representative of a more inclusive progressive strand of southern liberalism, a part of a wave of "new southern liberalism," one that would unite the different branches of southern progressivism, liberalism, and radicalism into one powerful umbrella organization.[81] Writing to Frank Graham, Lucy Randolph Mason expressed the unifying sentiment shared by members of the Conference, "The South cannot be saved by middle class liberals alone—they must make common cause with labor, the dispossessed on the land and the Negro…Some may find it too shocking to have the other three so articulate about

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[77] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 470; Newberry, Without Urgency or Ardor, 19.
[78] Durr, interview, October 1975, 85
[79] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 137.
[80] Glen, Highlander, 70.
[81] Sullivan, Days of Hope, 99, 167.

their needs. But this is the basis for progress…in the South."[82] The Southern Conference would for the next ten years be one of the most progressive forces for change within the South. Its political campaigns against the poll-tax, labor rights, and social and economic inequalities between the races were unprecedented for a southern interracial organization. The organization's effort would challenge the image of a homogenously racist South.

[82]John A. Salmond, Miss Lucy of the CIO: The Life and Times of Lucy Randolph Mason, 1882-1959 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 155.

Chapter 2: The Anti-Poll Tax Crusade (1939-1942)

In the final day of the Birmingham conference, the conferees established the Southern Conference for Human Welfare as a permanent organization. They elected Frank Porter Graham, in his absence, as the Chairman of the new organization. Graham, a highly respected educator with impeccable liberal credentials, brought the new fledging organization recognition and credibility. The Southern Conference came out of Birmingham with high hopes and a broad agenda. It ambitiously pledged to promote the general welfare, to improve the economic, social and cultural standards of the southern people, to initiate and support progressive legislation in Congress and states, and finally, to secure the cooperation of other progressive southern organizations and coordinate activities. To live up to its members' high expectations, the Conference was authorized to establish twelve committees, each dealing with a different field. The ambitious agenda faced a logistical nightmare and a lack of manpower to carry it out. Because each member of the Southern Conference hailed from a different state across the South

and each had his and her own duty and responsibility to meet, it was impossible for them to hold meetings and maintain a working committee. Out of the twelve planned committees, only one would become an effective instrument of the Southern Conference in its early years: the Civil Rights Committee.[83]

The Civil Rights Committee (CRC), established in February 1939, took on the most important and ambitious goal of the Southern Conference: the repeal of the poll tax. The Southern Conference's effort represented the first major attempt by an interracial organization to end voting discrimination in the South. Maury Maverick, a Congressman from Texas, was elected chairman of the committee, Virginia Durr of the Women's Division of the Democratic Party was chosen to be its vice chairwoman, and Joseph Gelders became its executive secretary. The three of them were charged with the task of "dramatiz[ing] for the country the evil of the poll tax."[84] The poll tax issue, unlike the Conference's other ambitious goals, was not abstract or overly broad. It was simple and could bring tangible benefits that could be easily communicated to the southern people. Furthermore, President Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt were strongly behind the effort to repeal of the poll tax. In a letter to Arkansas Congressman Brooks Hays, the President condemned the poll tax as "contrary to the fundamental democracy and its representative form of government in which we believe," and promised that he would publicly support measures to repeal the poll tax via the Federal government because "there is no reason under the sun why I should not talk about an important general principle that applies under our constitutional form of government in every state in the union."[85] In a letter to Gelders, F.D.R. urged him and the Conference to take up the cause against the poll tax. With the unanimous and

[83] Douty, "Southern Conference Report,"15-16, 27.
[84] Durr, interview, March 1975, 93, 104 ; Foreman "Decade of Hope," 142
[85] Brooks Hays, A Southern Moderate Speaks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 22.

uncontroversial support from all the Conference's members and the urging of President Roosevelt, the repeal of the poll tax was made the number one priority of the Conference.[86]

The poll tax was one of the many disenfranchising devices the South created during the late nineteenth century.[87] Initially enacted to bar black voters from the poll, it was later used to keep poor whites from voting also. Through most of its history, the poll tax was a much more popular target for reformers than the literacy test or the white primary. According to the historian of southern politics, V.O. Key Jr., the poll tax often played the role of "chief villain" in the national discussion of what was wrong with the South. Many blamed the poll tax for being one of the chief causes of the Democratic Party's domination of the South, why poor whites continued to be poor, and why African Americans continued to be oppressed. On its face, the poll tax was a simply tax a voter had to pay before he or she could vote in an election. The amount taxed varied between one and two dollars in the eight southern states that charged it in 1938, but variations existed among different counties within the same state. Most of the revenue from the poll tax would go to public schools and education. Key pointed out, however, that the money collected from the poll tax was negligible and, unlike other taxes, the levy was not mandatory unless one was planning to vote. The poll tax, then, was not to generate revenues, as its defenders vehemently claimed, but was purely a disenfranchising device. Adding to the deterrence effect of the poll tax was the requirement that the tax had to be paid months before the election began. In Georgia, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia, for example, the tax had to be paid six to ten months before the election, a time when interest in the election was at its lowest point. The most serious disfranchising instrument of the poll tax was the accumulation of previously

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[86] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 17, 44.

[87] Florida was the first state to establish a poll tax in 1889, Mississippi and Tennessee soon followed in 1890, Arkansas established its poll tax in 1893, South Carolina in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, North Carolina in 1900, Alabama in 1901, and finally, Virginia and Texas in 1902. Georgia's poll tax was passed long before the beginning of the disfranchisement period.

unpaid poll taxes. The accumulation began once the eligible voter reached the age of twenty-one. Alabama led the South with the harshest cumulative provision, a maximum cumulation of $36.00. Considering that the average annual income of a southerner in 1937 was a measly $314 a year, the average worker barely had enough to subsist on let alone afford the luxury of voting. One Alabama Democratic Party official proudly boasted that once a voter owed $4.50, $6.00, or $7.50 in back poll taxes, the state had virtually eliminated the person as a voter.[88]

The poll tax was frequently manipulated by political machines to shift elections in their candidates' favor. In important races, the political machines would finance block payments that pay the poll taxes of a large group of voters who would support the machines' candidates. When a local race was heating up in one North Alabama county, the local registrars saw over ten thousand dollars in poll taxes paid the day before the deadline, whereas the greatest annual collection before was only $9,747. Another story related the experience of an Alabama teacher who found his poll tax was paid for when he tried to pay it. A few days later, the defeated candidates of the recent election came to the teacher's home and demanded that the teacher refund the poll tax payment the defeated candidate had made on behalf of the teacher, who did not have the courtesy to vote for him. In Texas, those who had paid the poll tax but did not vote would have their ballots cast for them. Corrupt politicians were not above abusing the liberal exemptions from the poll tax many states made for elderly voters and disabled people, who often did not vote, and had phantom votes cast using their names. Sometimes, even the deceased elders voted for a candidate. Poll manipulations by the political machines were aided by compliance of

[88] V.O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics In State and Nation (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977 copyrighted 1949), 579-81; Virginius Dabney, "Shall the South's Poll Tax Go?" The New York Times Magazine February 12, 1939, 112; William H. Lawrence, "Drive Shaped On Poll Tax In Eight States," Washington Post, February 12, 1940; "Report of National Emergency Committee on the Economic Condition of the South" NYT August 13, I938; see also Will Maslow and Joseph B. Robison, "Civil Rights Legislation and the Fight for Equality, 1862-1952," The University of Chicago Law Review 20 no. 3 (Spring 1953): 376-78.

the registrars who were in charge of collecting the poll tax. These gatekeepers had an enormous influence on whether a voter was qualified or not. Registrars could make the payment process complicated and tedious if they deemed the potential voters undesirable. Even qualified white voters like Virginia Durr might experience bureaucratic delays and subtle intimidations because they were not natives of the state they were registering in.[89] "They didn't want me to vote," Durr, a native of Alabama said, recounting her experience trying to register in Virginia, "Nobody in Virginia wanted you to vote….they didn't care about my vote, they didn't care about anybody's vote unless they knew you….I was an outsider, a stranger. So, I couldn't vote." [90] The poll tax was one of the most effective tools employed by the political machines to control the number of voters at each election. Unlike the one-time literacy or civic test, the poll tax could be used at every election.

The debilitating effect of the poll tax to southern voters was felt immediately after its passage. Two years after Tennessee enacted the poll tax in 1890, it lost over 40,000 voters, compared to 1888; Mississippi during the same period saw a loss of 60,000 voters; Virginia, within two years of the poll tax's passage, lost 130,000 voters. The Southern Conference calculated that in the 1940 election, of the 13.6 million qualified southern voters, only three million, or 22 percent, cast a ballot, thus disenfranchising over ten million people. The eight southern states with the poll tax had the lowest participation rate in the country. Another study found that in the 1942 election, 25 out of every 100 people voted in non-poll tax states, but only 3 out of 100 in poll tax states. President Harry Truman's Committee on Civil Rights reported that

[89] George C Stoney, " Suffrage in the South Part I: The Poll Tax" Survey Graphic: Magazine for Social Interpretation 29, no. 1 (January 1940): 5-9; Key, Southern Politics, 595-96; Robert Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Vol.2: Means of Ascent (New York: Vintage Book, 1990), 180; Durr, interview, March 1975, 196-201.
[90] Durr, interview, March 1975, 201.

in the 1944 presidential elections saw 18.31 percent of the potential voters in the eight poll tax states cast a ballot, versus the 68.74 percent in non-poll tax states.[91]

Those who were hurt the most by the poll tax were poor southerners both black and whites. Tenant farmers, with their rock bottom earning, could never afford the price of the ballot. In addition, transportation to get to country registrars was difficult and expensive in rural areas. When these poor farmers migrated to the South to the cities looking for jobs in the factories during the South's urbanization boom in the first half of the twentieth century, they continued to be disenfranchised by the poll tax. Urban workers and salaried men, if their pitiful wages would allow it, could not afford to take the day off to pay their poll tax. Without being able to vote in local elections, these workers had little say about who would be elected as town sheriffs and local and state officials, men who had the power to crush any attempt at unionization. And without the means to bargain for better wages, the workers remained poor and incapable of sending their children to school and improve the next generation's standard of living. Southern liberals saw this as a vicious cycle brought on by disfranchisement. They, somewhat went so far as to blame the poll tax as one of the primary causes for keeping the South in perpetual poverty. They pointed out that the eight states that had the poll tax were at the bottom of every health, housing, and education standard list.s[92]

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[91] "Brief History of Disfranchisement in the South," Southern Patriot 1, no. 10 (October 1943): 6-7; Gordon M. Connelly and Harry H. Field, "The Non-Voter-Who He Is, What He Thinks," The Public Opinion Quarterly 8, no. 2 (Summer 1944): 176; William M. Brewer, "The Poll Tax and Poll Taxers," The Journal of Negro History 29, no. 3 (July 1944): 265; President's Committee on Civil Rights, To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 38-39; Key, Southern Politics, 617. Key, however, doubted the impact poll tax had on disenfranchising voters was as dramatic. He contended that many other factors played into the low participation rates. Key believed, at most, the repeal of poll tax, by itself, would only raise the voting pool of white voters by no more than five or ten percent.

[92] Howard Odum, "Social Change in the South," Journal of Politics 10, no.2 (1948): 243; Key, Southern Politics, 589; Durr, interview, March 1975, 93; Reed, Simple Decency, 24-25; "Effects of Poll Tax on Congress", SP 1, no.10 (October 1943): 2.

Advanced liberals like Clark Foreman believed that poor southerners were the natural base of President Roosevelt's New Deal. They felt that the working class would naturally be progressive because it was in their economic interests to be so. Furthermore, the South had enjoyed tremendous benefits from the New Deal through federal spending. Nevertheless, despite his enormous popularity in the South, F.D.R.'s failed purge revealed how politically vulnerable he was in the region. But advanced southern liberals did not blame Roosevelt's defeat on the ordinary southerners; it was their political leaders who abandoned F.D.R. and disenfranchised southern people, they argued. [93] The "only hope for progressive democracy in the South lies in the lower economic groups—particularly the wage earner," Lucy Mason wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt, "Yet this is the group so largely disfranchised by the poll-tax requirements of eight southern states."[94] The potential power of the South's working class vote was tantalizingly tempting. In Birmingham, Alabama alone, 30,000 new voters, mostly union members, could potentially be registered to vote and mobilized in a city that had only 60,000 registered voters and only 20,000 who actually voted. Advanced liberals and F.D.R. believed that if voting restrictions like the poll tax could be removed from the South, then the President could build a powerful political base from the working class and continue expanding the New Deal without conservatives' obstruction.[95]

Another reason why the Southern Conference wanted to the tackle poll tax first was because cautious liberals within the organization believed the repeal of the poll tax had more potential support in the white South than the abolishment of the white primary or literary test.

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[93] William Carleton, "The Conservative South—A Political Myth," Virginia Quarterly Review 22, no.2 (Spring 1946):190-91; Leuchtenburg, The White House, 50; Mary Braggiotti, "The Patriot Salutes Clark Foreman," SP 3, no. 3 (March 1945): 7, reprinted from the New York Post; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 62; Durr, Outside, 130.
[94] Tindall, New South, 640.
[95] Robert J. Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box: Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement," The Journal of Southern History 57, no. 2 (May 1991): 207.

Although the poll tax was originally designed to disfranchise black voters, it now operated primarily as a deterrent to poor white voting. Statistics showed that 64 percent of potential white adult voters in the South were disfranchised because of the tax. Since there were other loopholes for whites to bypass the other restrictions, the poll tax stood as their only obstacle to the ballots. The removal of the financial barrier would thus disproportionately increase the number of white voters over black voters. And even if black voters could afford to vote with the repeal of the poll tax, they still had to face the literacy/civic test, the property requirement, and the white primary.

The Democratic Party's stranglehold on southern politics meant that winning the Democratic primary was equivalence to winning the election. Since wealthy African Americans could afford the poll tax, their exclusion from the Democratic primaries served as one of the most effective disfranchisement devices against southern blacks. The poll tax would only represent a burden on black voters when every other suffrage obstacles had been removed. Maury Maverick, chairman of the Civil Rights Committee heavily emphasized in his testimony before the Congressional House Judiciary Committee that the repeal of the poll tax would substantially benefit poor white voters over black voters. Another member of the Conference, the publisher Barry Bingham of the *Louisville-Courier* rejected the conservative Democrats' argument that the poll tax was a device to preserve white supremacy. Like Maverick, Bingham insisted that white voters stand to gain much more than blacks.[96] Despite these facts, African-American members of the Southern Conference strongly supported the fight to end of the poll tax. They realized that the repeal of the poll tax was the beginning of a much larger struggle to end disenfranchisement in the South. "…my God, the blacks had stronger feelings [about the poll

[96] Sosna, In Search, 98; Brewer, "Poll Tax and Poll Taxers," 264; Moon, Balance of Power, 175; Key, Southern Politics, 579, 598, 618; Judith K. Doyle, "Maury Maverick and Racial Politics in San Antonio, Texas, 1938-1941," The Journal of Southern History 53, no.2 (May 1987): 212; Ernest K. Lindley, "Case against the Poll Tax," WP April 14, 1939.

tax]," Virginia Durr recounted, "although they always said that even when we got the poll tax abolished, they still had the registration restrictions to get around...they always realized that their own battle would have to come later."[97]

The poll tax represented a daunting challenge for would be reformers who sought to repeal it state by state. State constitutions and political and economic white elites stood as barriers to change. As of 1939, only three southern states had abolished their poll tax: North Carolina in 1920, a Huey-Long-dominated Louisiana in 1934, and Florida in 1937. The successes of these three states gave the Southern Conference hope that the poll tax was not the sacred cow of the South. But to create a grass-root mobilization effort in all the remaining southern states would require far more resources and coordination than the young Southern Conference could muster. Furthermore, of the eight remaining poll tax states, seven required their constitutions to be laboriously revised, making it almost impossible to repeal without near unanimous support from the state legislatures and the voting public within the states. When the state legislature of Tennessee successfully passed a law ending the use of the poll tax, its State Supreme Court declared the act unconstitutional and required the legislature to pass a constitutional amendment in two legislative sessions and then have the approval of the people in a constitutional referendum. But even if the anti-poll-tax amendment passed through the legislatures, standing in its way was the financially well-off and politically motivated southern electorate who were unwilling to relinquish their exclusive voting privilege. A 1941 Gallup poll discovered that two-thirds of voters who had paid their poll tax were against repealing the poll tax, as opposed to two-thirds of the rest of country who supported its repeal. The number of poll-tax state voters against the repeal of the tax remained more than half during the heights of World War II. When Arkansas tried to get rid of its poll tax in 1938, its voters rejected the measure by a margin of two

[97] Durr, interview, March 1975, 106.

to one. The middle and upper classes of the South, whose prosperity rested on the attraction of South's cheap labor to industry, did not want a voting working-class with strong tie to unions.[98] Gelders lamented that this small voting populace in poll tax states constituted "a rule by an oligarchy; an oligarchy unwilling to vote itself out of power."[99] A more effective strategy would be to have the federal government ban the poll tax from federal elections. Although a poll tax for the local and state elections wouldn't be nullified, it would give the southerners more power to choose their congressional representatives who would, presumably, be friendlier to later legislation to end poll tax and other disfranchising devices.

After the Civil Rights Committee was established, Gelders immediately headed for Washington D.C. to introduce a bill to repeal the poll tax. Despite Gelders labeling the bill as a solution to a national problem, not just a southern one, no southern congressmen wanted the honor of being the first to introduce a bill to repeal the poll tax. In spite of the fact that the repeal of the poll tax would enfranchise more white voters than black, many of them feared that the appearance of crossing the "color line" would bring swift political and social retribution from their constituents and colleagues.[100] Maury Maverick, who would have introduced the bill, had lost his Congressional reelection bid and was now serving as the Mayor of San Antonio. Fortunately for the Civil Rights Committee, its vice chairwoman, Virginia Durr, whose husband Clifford Durr was the head general counsel of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and brother-in-law was Supreme Justice Hugo Black, was living in Washington D.C.. Durr's political connections and determination made up for the loss of Maverick. The efforts of Durr

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[98] "Democratic Sprit Stirs Six State Legislatures," SP 3, no. 2 (February 1945): 1; "Brief History of Disfranchisement in the South," SP 1 no. 10 (October 1943): 6; "Gallup and Fortune Polls," The Public Opinion Quarterly 5, no. 3 (Autumn, 1941): 470; "Public Opinion Polls," The Public Opinion Quarterly 7, no. 3 (Autumn 1943): 484; Lindley, "Case Against The Poll Tax," 15.

[99] Stephen F. Lawson, Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999). 59-60.

[100] Brewer, "Poll Tax and Poll Taxers," 269.

and Gelders gave the CRC the organizational cohesiveness, independence, and political connections that it desperately needed to survive and introduce legislation during its early and difficult years.

Virginia Foster Durr, born 1903, and raised in Birmingham, Alabama to an ancient family. Her grandfather was one of the few southerners who did not believe in the Civil War and did not invest his money in "The Cause." Because of his foresight he was able to preserve his fortune and expand his plantation to 35,000 acres after the end of the war. Although her grandfather's plantation was much diminished by Durr's generation, she grew up with the romantic vision of the South and its benevolent patrician class—blacks were happy and dearly loyal to their benevolent white masters. Durr went up north to attend college at Wellesley before marrying her husband, Clifford Durr. When the New Deal came her husband moved the family to Washington D.C. in 1933. By chance she met her old acquaintance from her Wellesley days, Clark Foreman, and invited his family over for her house for a visit. By this time Foreman was already firmly committed to social equality. He unsuccessfully tried to convert Durr to his point of view. [101] Durr, shocked by Foreman's radical ideas, felt he had betrayed everything she and the South stood for. "You are going back on all the traditions of the South," Durr admonished Foreman, "You, a Howell of Georgia going back on all of it. What do you think of the Civil War? What did we stand for? White Supremacy of course." [102] Foreman, never a man to back down from a fight, scolded Durr as "a white, Southern, bigoted, prejudiced, provincial girl."[103] Despite the harsh exchange of words with Foreman, Durr was becoming more liberal as she spent more time in Washington. Durr, who thought her black mailman was the smartest African American she

[101] Virginia Foster Durr, Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr, ed. Hollinger F. Barnard (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 3-5, 66-69, 78-79, 103.
[102] Durr, interview, March 1975, 38.
[103] Ibid.

knew before her time in the capital, was now traveling in New Dealers intellectual circles, which brought her into contacts with powerful African-American leaders like Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Youth Administration. Furthermore, the harsh economic reality of the South and the suffering of its people during the Great Depression shattered Durr's simplistic and idealistic notion of the region. Her father and mother lost almost everything in the crash. As a volunteer for the Red Cross, Durr saw the worst kind of destitution and misery, men breaking down because they could not find any work to support their family. Men whom she thought were honorable leading citizens would employ strike breakers to use the most underhanded and brutal methods to prevent unionization of their mills and then deny any guilt. She found it contradictory that many southerners who spent their childhoods in the loving care of their black nannies would later find it repulsive to share a seat with them and their children on the bus. The suffering of the poor and the South's response convinced Durr that whatever system the South had relied on for so long was broken. By late 1938 she was against racial discrimination in every form, including segregation. Durr stood as an example the of "Silent South" that southern liberals believed was there. Durr would carry on a zealous crusade against racial injustice and involved herself in some of the most important civil rights events in American history. [104] "Virginia was a very articulate, charismatic sort of person that people just soaked in," a friend and fellow civil rights activist recalled, "She wasn't afraid of the devil with his horns screwed on tight, she was just greater than anybody."[105] In 1939, Durr focused her formidable will on the poll tax.

Gelders initially envisioned a multiple-front strategy for tackling the poll tax. The Civil Rights Committee would lobby Congress for a repeal of the poll tax in federal elections and actively file suit against states charging poll tax. The first and only case the Southern Conference

[104] Durr, interview, March 1975, 59, 94-97.
[105] Edith Mitchell Dabbs, interview by Elizabeth Burns, October 4, 1975, interview G-0022, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 40.

initiated, *Pirtle v. Brown* (1941), was on behalf of Henry Pirtle, a white Tennessean, against the poll tax charged by his state in federal elections. The Southern Conference contended that the tax did not represent a qualification of the citizens' to vote, but a restriction. The right to vote for member of Congress and the President of the United States came from the Federal Constitution and federal elections were functions of the national government. State government, therefore, had no authority to regulate or impair the national government's sovereignty to enfranchise its citizens as stated in the Fourteenth Amendment. Both the District Court and the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, following Supreme Court decision in *Breedlove* v. *Suttlesi* where the Supreme Court unanimously upheld Georgia's poll tax law, rejected the argument and ruled that it was the states who granted the right of suffrage to the citizens and hence Tennessee did not violate any federal law. The case ended when the Supreme Court refused to grant it a writ of *certioratiri* on the ground of its *Breedlove* decision. Defeat in the *Pirtle* case had a profound impact on the Southern Conference's outlook and strategy. *Pirtle* spelled the end of the Southern Conference's attempt to use the courts to lift South's suffrage oppression. It had hoped to file two more cases in Arkansas and Alabama, but the loss of the $5,000 investment made on *Pirtle* did not make the court strategy a viable option for the severely cash-strapped Conference. The Conference learned that the courts were unpredictable and too expensive for appeals without adequate financial reserve or pooled resources from other organizations. Finally, even if the Conference could get a victory in the federal courts, without the support of the southern court of public opinion or intrusive federal enforcement, the decision would ring hollow in the South. The Conference's next best hope was to get Congress to pass legislation outlawing the poll tax.[106]

[106] Augusta Jackson Strong, "Poll Tax Law Challenged in Federal Court," CD November 4, 1939: 12; "H.R. is Constitutional," SP 1, no. 10 (October 1943): 3; *Pirtle v. Brown*, 118 F.2d 218 (6th Cir. 1941); Reed, Simple Decency, 66-67; "Our Democratic Rights—and How to Enforce Them," SP 4, no.3 (March 1946): 3.

The Southern Conference's Civil Rights Committee began its lobbying efforts under trying circumstances. When Gelders arrived at Washington D.C. in 1939, there was little in term of organizational infrastructure to support the Conference's campaign. The CRC did not have a central headquarter or a paid professional staff to handle its office work and lobbying efforts. Without a southern supporter in the House, Gelders and Durr had to turn elsewhere. They found a kindred spirit and a staunch ally in the liberal Congressman Lee Geyer of California. Not only did Geyer agree to introduce the bill in 1939, but his congressional office became the headquarters of the homeless CRC. Geyer's nephew and secretary became the CRC's sole full time office staff. Durr, with her family responsibility, could only spend two to three days a week at the office. Gelders, after entrusting the poll tax work on Geyer, periodically left to go down South to work on other initiatives, leaving Durr, who confessed to not knowing how to operate a mimeograph machine, in charge of the entire operation. Due to a grossly inadequate salary from the Southern Conference Gelders could not afford to stay in Washington full time. But despite his chronic absences, Gelders was entirely devoted to the repeal of the poll tax. Durr recounted one time when she found Gelders sleeping outside of the Geyer's office building from the night before because he did not have a place to stay. She bought him some breakfast and invited him back to her home to shower. He would stay with the Durrs and a few other friends whenever possible, but Gelders was a drifter. Durr, in spite of her family duty and her inexperience in office management, labored tirelessly to make the campaign to repeal the poll tax successful. She organized meetings and rallies with unions to create an anti-poll-tax coalition. Using her connections, the most important being Mrs. Roosevelt, Durr lobbied with Lee Geyer and raised desperately needed money for the CRC. Durr was the anchor that held the Civil Rights Committee together during these difficult early years. The rest of the staff was made up of

mostly young and idealistic volunteers from the Tolan Committee or borrowed staffs from other friendly congressmen. Their daily activities involved lobbying congressmen and publishing a newsletter, "The Poll Tax Repealer," to raise awareness and support for the anti-poll-tax bill. Overall, it was very amateurish operation. But what the CRC lacked in professionalism and the efficiency of a high-priced lobbying firm, it made up for it with its unwavering dedication, optimism, and faith in the righteousness of its cause. When the first bill to repeal the poll tax was introduced to Congress in August 1939 Geyer credited the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in the bill for making the introduction possible.[107]

The first anti-poll-tax bill, predictably, faced a formidable front of conservative southerners in Congress. Geyer, aware of the courts' sanction of the constitutionality of the poll tax, argued that the bill's primary goal was to end the "pernicious political activity" of the political machines in federal elections. He attached the anti-poll-tax bill as an amendment to a larger anti-corruption bill, the Hatch Act, which sought to curtail the participation of federal employees in partisan political activity. The fiercest opponents of the bill were southern congressmen and senators who had the most seniority in committees. Of the twenty-four major committees, ten chairmen were from poll tax states and fourteen had ranking members who supported the poll tax. Hatton Sumners of Texas, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, threw every parliamentary obstacle he could to slow down the hearing of the bill and its introduction to the rest of the House. Sumner successfully sabotaged the bill when it died in the House Judiciary Committee. Geyer, undeterred, reintroduced the bill the next session, and with the help of Congressman George Bender of Ohio, got it out of Summers' Judiciary

[107]Durr, interview, March 1975, 99-102, 124; Durr, interview, October 1975, 57-58, 73; Durr, Outside the Magic Circle, 128-29; Braggiotti, "Clark Foreman," 7.

Committee and into the House. [108] Conservatives in the House caustically raised the charge of anti-white and Negro-empowerment against Geyer's bill. William Colmer of Mississippi warned that "if Congress can remove the poll tax requirements it can also remove educational requirements and registration itself."[109] Nevertheless, the anti-poll-tax force scored its first major victory when the House passed the bill with a substantial margin of 252 to 84. Unfortunately, the Senate, with its filibustering privilege, became the graveyard of the anti-poll-tax bill.[110]

Gelders and Durr initially approached George Norris of Nebraska, a progressive former Republican who supported Roosevelt's election in 1932, to carry the fight against the poll tax in the Senate. Norris's reelection defeat in 1942 forced them to turn to Claude Pepper of Florida. Pepper, whose state of Florida had abolished the poll tax in 1937, was a devoted New Dealer. Like Durr and Gelders, Pepper believed the repeal of the poll tax as a major step toward liberalizing southern politics. He credited his own hard won 1938 reelection battle to the votes he got from newly enfranchised Floridians. The then newly elected Senator Pepper, however, was more cautious than the Southern Conference leadership. Pepper resigned from the Southern Conference over its segregation controversy and filibustered along with the conservatives against the anti-lynching bill in 1938. But after his first year as a senator, Pepper became increasingly liberal. After 1938 Pepper would vote for every resolution of cloture to end debate and every civil rights bill that would come up. But even with Florida's poll tax repealed, Pepper would be taking a tremendous political risk supporting federal intrusion into the states' political affair. To bolster Pepper's confident, Durr got Mrs. Roosevelt to invite Pepper to the White House for a

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[108] "Fight Awaits Poll-Tax Bill," NYT, March 17, 1940; "Poll Tax Fosters Corruption, Virginian Tells Committee," WP, April 11, 1940; "Seek Federal Ban on Poll Tax," CD, August 19, 1939; "Poll Tax Victory in Sight," SP 1,no. 8 (Aug. 1943): 8; Durr, interview, March 1975, 100; Durr, interview, October 1975, 57; "CIO and AF of L join To Wipe out Poll Tax," CD, March 2, 1940.

[109] Lawson, Black Ballots, 67.

[110] John H. Sengstacke, "Today and Tomorrow," CD, August 10, 1940. The vote in the House broke down sectional lines. The exception came from the eight southern congressmen who voted for the bill and the eleven northern ones who opposed it.

luncheon and surround him with southern liberals like William Alexander, Aubrey Williams, Mark Ethridge, and Frank Graham to convince him to pick up the bill.[111]

Pepper introduced his own bill in 1941, which would not only abolish the poll tax in federal elections, but also for the primaries leading up to the elections. Unlike Geyer, who justified his bill as an anti-corruption act, Pepper directly challenged the integrity of the poll tax. Pepper contended that the poll tax served no other purpose than to limit the number of voters in the South and was thus unconstitutional. Despite the courts contending that the states had the right to regulate its voting requirements, Pepper argued that the states' rights extended only as far as Congress allowed them to.[112] Peppers pointed out that in the Supreme Court's decision *United States v. Classic* (1941), the Court had decided that "While, in a loose sense, the right to vote for representatives in Congress is sometimes spoken of as a right derived from the states, this statement is true only in the sense that the states are authorized by the Constitution to legislate on the subject…[and] to the extent that Congress has not restricted state action by the exercise of its powers to regulate elections…"[113] This decision, Pepper declared, showed that the regulation of federal elections fell within the authority of Congress to regulate. Defenders of the poll tax rebutted Pepper's claim and argued that the *Classic* decision only applied to qualified voters, and those who could not pay their poll tax were not qualified to begin with. Some senators called for a constitutional amendment to resolve the debate. The Southern Conference, however, did not think that an amendment was a practical method and saw it as nothing more than a dilatory tactic of the conservatives. It firmly believed that Congress was perfectly within its constitutional authority to control the states' regulation on voting rights. The constitutional debate was

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[111]Durr, interview, October 1975, 85; Claude Pepper, interview by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, February 1, 1974, interview A-0056, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina, NC, 8-9; Durr interview, March 1975, 123.
[112] Lawson, Black Ballots, 63-65; Claude Pepper, "Article 6—No Title," WP, November 22, 1942, sec. B3.
[113] *United States v. Classic*, 313 U.S. 299, 315 (1941).

inconsequential in the immediate scheme, however, since the southern reactionaries in the Senate had the power to filibuster the Geyer-Pepper bill regardless of its constitutional merits.[114]

The conservative Dixie bloc in Congress had a good reason to fear the repeal of the poll tax. Many of the entrenched conservative senators were elected with a winning margin between one and three percent of their people. The repeal of the poll tax, with its expansion of lower class voters, many of whom fervently supported Roosevelt and the New Deal, made future reelections unpredictable for these politicians who had never faced a serious election challenge through most of their careers. The reactionaries' efforts, however, might have failed if not for implicit support from the cautious southern liberals in the Senate. Men like Lister Hill and John Sparkman were fearful for their reelection chances if they supported the repeal of the poll tax. Supporters of the repeal were caught in a Catch-22 position with wavering senators. The hesitating senators privately endorsed the attempts to repeal to the poll tax because they would stand to benefit from the expansion of the electorate, but refused to support the repeal publicly unless enough votes could be mustered without them being the deciding votes. Without their votes repeal would be impossible. These cautious southern liberals filibustered Pepper's bill alongside the conservatives. Despite the early optimism of the bill supporters and a straw poll predicting the bill would pass the Senate by a vote of 61 to 36, the Senate rejected the call to cloture by a vote of 41 to 37 against shutting off the debate, effectively killing the bill. The lack of support from cautious liberal southern senators had made the difference. Defeat in the Senate was a fatal setback in the campaign to repeal the poll tax. Pepper would continue to introduce a bill to repeal the poll tax every year till the end of the Southern Conference's existence in 1948, but each time it failed to survive the Senate. Despite the failure, the Southern Conference's poll tax movement

[114] "Senator Seeks Amendment to Bar Poll Taxes," Chicago Daily Tribune, October 16, 1942; SP 1, no.11 (November 1943): 5; "H.R. 7 is Constitutional," SP 1, no.10 (October 1943): 3; Brewer, "Poll Tax and Poll Taxers," 272.

had a measure of success. By 1942 the campaign against the poll tax had become a national movement extending far beyond the regional focus of the South.[115]

Lee Geyer, before his death in late 1941, envisioned a national committee to repeal the poll tax. Gelders initially resisted the attempt to broaden the movement beyond the South, but the united resistance put up by southerners in Congress forced Gelders to change his perspective. To garner support for the Geyer-Pepper bill, Gelders and Durr had to look for Republican and liberal Democratic allies from other regions outside of the South. Gelders understood that the success or failure of the campaign against the poll tax depended on public opinion. He was confident that if the American people found out all the evils of the poll tax, they would demand its abolition. The raising of national support for the legislation required funds and manpower, which were beyond the meager resources of the Civil Rights Committee. A national coalition involving a broad spectrum of organizations to mobilize opposition against the poll tax became more attractive as the Civil Rights Committee's battle in the Senate gained more attention. The idea of a national organization created from the CRC was made easier by the large degree of freedom and autonomy the Committee had enjoyed since its inception. The Civil Rights Committee was the only committee to have its own budget aside from the main Conference. Howard Lee, the executive secretary of the SCHW, even expressed concern that the CRC was competing against the Southern Conference for the same donors and called for more centralized fund raising. Finally, financial constraint forced the Southern Conference to turn the Civil Rights Committee into a national organization. By 1941, the CRC had raised only $3,825, versus the $4,470 of the general Conference during the same period, and had spent $4,425. Gelders had to go for long

[115] Key, Southern Politics, 596; Durr, interview, March 1975, 107-08; Durr, Outside the Magic Circle, 160-62; Harry McAlpin "Southern Bloc Formed To Halt Poll Tax Bill," CD, November 7, 1942, 1,4; "Norris To Press Finish Fight Against Poll Tax," CD, November 14, 1942: 5; Robert De Vore, "Cloture Defeat Spells Doom of Poll-Tax Foes," WP, November 24, 1942:1, 14; see "Disenfranchisement by Means of the Poll Tax," Harvard Law Review 53, no. 4 (February 1940): 645-652.

periods of time without drawing a salary. A national organization would free the CRC from the Southern Conference's restrictive requirement that only southerners could be a member and would help raise fund from all across the country instead of relying on the South's paltry contributions. The Southern Conference and Lee Geyer thus created the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (NCAPT) in August1941 out of the Civil Rights Committee, transitioning from a regional movement to an organization waging a national crusade against the poll tax. The Southern Conference became a member of the Anti-Poll Tax Committee's vast coalition where they retained a very close informal relationship and shared many of the same board members and officers.[116]

The National Poll Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax was a clearinghouse of anti-poll-tax efforts among a wide ranging number of regional groups and national organizations. Within its ranks were national organizations like the CIO, the AFL, the Railway Unions, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Elks, the American Newspaper Guild, the YWCA, the National Negro Congress, the NAACP, the Quakers and the Methodist Church. By the end of 1942, sixty-five organizations were affiliated with the Anti-Poll Tax Committee. Geyer, shortly before his death, became the chairman and Durr the vice-chairwoman of the NCAPT. Its board members consisted of Southern Conference directors and supporters like Eleanor Roosevelt, Frank Graham, Virginia Durr, Mary Bethune, John Lewis and his daughter, Kathryn Lewis. Despite the impressive coalition it assembled, the NCAPT heavily depended on funding from John L. Lewis and the CIO. Lewis brought to the NCAPT a cohort of unions which became the key to its strength. After Lee Geyer passed away in late 1941, it was the Railroad Brotherhood's building in Washington that housed the NCAPT's headquarters for a time. With its impressive coalition the

[116] Lawson, Black Ballots, 62; Reed, Simple Decency, 66; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 28-29; Durr, Outside, 152.

NCAPT was able to fulfill its dream of moving the poll tax from a regional problem into the mainstream consciousness of the nation.[117]

In spite of its failure, the fight for the Geyer-Pepper bill demonstrated a growing sophistication in the Anti-Poll Tax Committee's tactics. Where previously the Committee had focused on showing off support for the repeal of the poll tax from prominent southern leaders in congressional hearings and lobbying within Congress, after the failure of the Geyer-Pepper bill in 1942, the Anti-Poll Tax Committee stepped up its political operation against those who talked the bill to death. The Committee targeted not only members of Congress, but their constituents. In 1943, the NCAPT sent out over 50,000 letters raising support for their campaign and produced more than 350,000 pieces of literature against the poll tax. It regularly held petitioning drives in important congressional districts to recruit ordinary southerners to pressure their representatives. Because the trepidation displayed by most moderate southern congressmen and senators in supporting repeal of the poll tax, the NCAPT abandoned its fixation on getting southern support. It expanded its congressional base to include liberal Republicans—a step that an exclusively southern political organization would have hesitated to contemplate. Within the first two weeks of 1943, four bills to repeal the poll tax were introduced in the House. With Geyer dead, the Anti-Poll Tax Committee initially threw its support to the gentlemanly Joseph Baldwin, a Republican from New York, hoping that through Baldwin's respectability they could get more Republicans to join their cause and unite the other three anti-poll bills under one bill. The militantly radical and eclectic Vito Marcantonio of New York, the only member in the House to have won primaries from the Democratic, Republican, and the American Labor Party and who had introduced his own anti-poll-tax bill in the House, furiously refused Virginia Durr's request

[117] Sullivan, Days of Hope,115; Durr, interview, March 1975, 117-18, 120, 123; Durr, interview, October 1975,76-77; Krueger, Promises to Keep,47; Reed, Simple Decency, 73.

to withdraw his bill in favor of Baldwin's. Although there was no difference between their bills, Marcantonio wanted his bill to be the one that do away with the poll tax. Marcantonio maneuvered to have Baldwin withdraw his bill and endorse Marcantonio's. Despite the unfriendly beginning with Marcantonio, the fiery congressman became one the Anti-Poll Tax Committee's staunchest supporters in Congress. And in spite of his reputation as a radical and fear from members of the NCAPT that the bill would never escape committee hearings, Marcantonio adroitly brought together Republicans to support his bill and passed anti-poll-tax legislation in the House in 1943, 1945, 1947, and 1949, only to have each bill fall in the Senate.[118]

At the same time the Geyer-Pepper bill was struggling in the Senate, the NCAPT scored a major victory against the poll tax when it got Congress to allow soldiers fighting in World War II to vote without being charged the poll tax from their home states. Durr, frustrated with the stalling of the Geyer-Pepper bill in the Senate, approached Mrs. Roosevelt for help from the administration. Together they came up with the idea of suspending poll tax for fighting soldiers. They correctly predicted that at a time when patriotic fever was at its highest, it would be politically dangerous and difficult for reactionaries to challenge the bill. Durr recruited Representative Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, one of the few close allies the Anti-Poll Tax Committee had in the southern congressional delegation, to offer an amendment to the Ramsay bill, to exempt the fighting soldiers from paying the poll tax for the duration of the war. The amendment was excluded from the bill by the conservative forces in the House, but Claude Pepper of Florida and Charles Brooks of Illinois revived the amendment in the Senate version of

[118]J. Lacey Reynolds, "Southerners Ask Congress To Ban Poll Tax**,"** WP, March 13, 1942; Reed, Simple Decency,75; Krueger, Promises to Keep,128; "Open Congress Drive To bar Poll Tax," CD, January 16, 1943; "Plan New Congress, Court Fight on Poll Tax," CD, December 5, 1942; Durr, interview, March 1975, 130, 134-35; Durr, interview, October 1975, 87; Tindall, New South, 641.

the bill despite warning from the Senate Majority Leader Alben Barkley not to do so. This act triggered an immediate fight from conservative Senator Walter George of Georgia. Conservatives, currently locked in a struggle to the death against the Geyer-Pepper bill, were terrified that, once enfranchised, soldiers would demand more concessions when they returned home. Repeal could potentially enfranchise more than 400,000 African-American soldiers who had never voted before.[119] Senator Tom Connolly of Texas and Lister Hill of Alabama called the Senate vote an attempt to "rupture the constitutional process."[120] The leader of the opposition in the House, John Rankin of Mississippi, went further when he condemned the bill as the beginning of a "[Communist] scheme to abolish State governments" and to turn over the elections "to certain irresponsible elements that are constantly trying to destroy private enterprise and to stir up trouble, especially in the Southern States." [121] The fighting spirit of the more moderate southerners like Senator George was quickly deflated however; they did not want to go on record denying the suffrage rights of the men and women who were engaging in a global struggle to protect democracy. The amendment passed the Senate next day with a vote of 33 to 20, with the twenty nay votes coming mostly from conservative Democrats and a few Republicans. With little appetite for a politically hazardous fight, the House voted 247 to 53 to pass the Soldier Voting Bill, with all except three of the opposition votes coming from southern congressman. Roosevelt signed the bill by mid September.[122]

The Soldier Vote Bill was the first significant victory for the Anti-Poll Tax Committee. Even though the Geyer-Pepper bill floundered in the Senate a few months later, the soldier bill

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[119] Durr, interview, March 1975, 131-32; Lawson, Black Ballots, 66; C.Trussell, "House Adopts Bill for Soldiers' Vote," NYT, July 24,1942; "Poll Tax Delays Soldier Vote Bill," NYT, August 25, 1942; "Senate Acts To Let Soldiers Die But Not Vote for Democracy," SP 1, no. 12 (December 1943): 4-5.
[120] "Action Completed for Soldier Votes," NYT, September 11, 1942.
[121] Rankin is quoted in "Votes for Soldiers," NYT, September 6, 1942; "Agree on Details of Soldier Voting," NYT, September 2, 1942.
[122] Senate Passes Bill for Soldier Vote," NYT, August 26, 1942; "The Nation," NYT, September 6, 1942; "Soldier Vote Bill Accepted by House," NYT, September 10, 1942.

victory gave activists hope that the poll tax was on its way out. The NCAPT's work against the poll pushed the issue to the national stage and made being against the poll tax politically acceptable. In 1944, the majority report of the Senate Judiciary Committee did not recognize the poll tax as a legitimate qualification for voting in federal elections, equating it with an inane restriction of the ballot to people with red hair or those who were a hundred year old. Away from Washington, the progressive governor of Georgia, Ellis Arnall, aided by the work of the Southern Conference's Georgia Committee, repealed the poll tax in his state in 1945, making it one of only four southern states without a poll tax. [123] Although the Southern Conference and the NCAPT ultimately failed to get an anti-poll-tax bill through the Senate, their work raised national awareness on the issue. The accomplishments of advanced liberals of the Southern Conference in building a national anti-poll-tax organization and working toward the repeal of the tax showed the rest of the country that southerners were not monolithic in their outlook toward suffrage and federal involvement.

The Southern Conference's national strategy to get rid of the poll tax defied the state-rights thinking of cautious southern liberals. Although cautious liberals abhorred the poll tax as much as advanced liberals, they saw it as an issue the South should resolve internally without federal intrusion. Sociologist Howard Odum, whose seminal work, *Southern Regions of the United States*, became a central defense of cautious liberalism, explained that the South was made up of a distinctive "folk-regional culture" which set it apart from the rest of the nation. Long-held traditions and customs in the South exerted a powerful pull forcing members of the community to conform to them. Attempts to change the folkways of the South through law and legal enforcement by forces would inevitably lead to "civil war in the community." A gradual shift in communal attitude was necessary before lasting change could be brought about.

[123] SP 2, no. 2 (February1944): 8; "Democratic Sprit Stirs Six State Legislatures." SP 3, no. 2 (February 1945):1.

Furthermore, Odum argued that only individuals who understood the nature of the South's folkways could devise successful programs for social change. The federal government lacked the local knowledge and sensitivity to understand regional reality and thus was not capable of creating lasting and meaningful social change in the South.[124]

Cautious southern liberals, especially those in the southern press, borrowed Odum's southern folkway thesis to argue against the federal intervention in a whole host of social issues. Hodding Carter, editor of the *Delta Democrat-Times*, opposed federal intervention in lynching, poll taxes, and employment practices. Lynching, he felt, was so heinous that it would die out on its own. The poll tax and job discrimination, on the other hand, were not the domain of the federal government to regulate and should be left to the states. Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution* echoed the sentiment when he declared that anti-poll tax legislation being considered before Congress was unconstitutional. And even if it were constitutional, McGill argued, it would destroy local determination and create an attitude of "Let the FBI do it" among southerners. Virginius Dabney of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* was strongly against the poll tax as an instrument of the corrupt political machine, but he was also against interference by the federal government. The states, Dabney argued, were more capable of handling local issues because they understood local concerns and could pass laws that fit their specific need. The federal government should step in only when the states were absolutely incapable of doing it themselves. Dabney, like Carter and McGill, feared that average southerners would consider federal intervention into their customs as an invasion and might react violently. Although the

[124] Howard Odum, Southern Regions of the United States (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 11; Odum is quoted from Howard Odum, "Lynchings, Fears and Folkways," The Nation, December 30, 1931, 719-20; Odum, Southern Regions, 582-85. One of the central themes of the Odum's thesis is that the South cannot continue to isolate itself from the rest of the country and must integrate itself with the rest of the nation in order to grow effectively. Nevertheless, the South must be allowed to preserve it distinctive folkways against outside pressures to change. Progress it thus a delicate act between local harmony and regional development. See also George B. Tindall, "The Significance of Howard W. Odum to Southern History: A Preliminary Estimate," The Journal of Southern History 24, no. 3 (August 1958): 298.

poll tax had little to do with the race issue, it was being falsely portrayed by conservatives as an attempt by radicals and outsiders to give blacks electoral power. Abolishing the poll tax through the states represented the safest option. Southerners would only consent to that to which they believed they had freely given consent.[125]

Although Dabney insisted those who were against the poll tax and federal intrusion were different from the "hardboiled bourbons" who were ranting against the anti-poll-tax bill in Congress, he readily joined the conservatives in Congress in declaring that "much of the [anti-poll-tax battle] is pitched on a hate-the-South key, and the whole South is denounced as though it were inhabited by ruthless exploiters and quasi-Fascists."[126] Cautious liberals' and conservatives' portrayal of support for the anti-poll-tax bill as alien interference and anti-South contradicted the fact that the Southern Conference, the Civil Rights Committee, and the active leadership of the Anti-Poll Tax Committee were southern. Because cautious liberals looked within the South for solutions to the region's problems, the advanced position of the Southern Conference in regard to federal intervention might as well been that of a northern agitator.

The South-centered, pragmatist position of the cautious liberals stood in contrast to the Southern Conference's national approach to southern problems. The differences between cautious and advanced southern liberals would be magnified by the events of World War II. The ideas of freedom and liberty, once abstract concepts, became more real for southern liberals. As millions of soldiers were shipped to all the corners of the world to combat an ideology of racial superiority and totalitarianism, the struggle at home for racial equality became more urgent and

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[125] Ann Waldron, Hodding Carter: The Reconstruction of a Racist (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1993), 151-57, 204-06; Ralph McGill, "Common Sense can Save Both." in Ralph McGill, No Place to Hide: The South and Human Rights, vol. 1, ed. Calvin m. Logue (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 123; Virginius Dabney, interview by Daniel Jordon and William H. Turpin, June 10-13, 1975, interview A-0311-1, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 62-63. 59-60.

[126] Virginius Dabney, "South Baiters and Poll Taxes," Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 15, 1945.

pertinent. African Americans, emboldened by the war's reaffirmation of the democratic principles against fascism, would challenge the nation to live up to its democratic ideals. The long held gradualist tendency of many cautious southern liberals became increasingly untenable and many retreated to the right in the face of more assertive demands for civil rights. Advanced liberals, on the other hand, would stand with the emboldened African Americans in their quest for greater freedom and prosperity. The Southern Conference would expand its role and ambition during the war years and its aftermath. The organization would not only fight against the poll tax at the federal level, but it would seek to mobilize the South politically against conservative Democrats. Where the cautious liberals would retreat from the race issue, the Southern Conference came to embrace it, advocating for the end of discrimination and social segregation. World War II and the postwar years would come to define the Southern Conference as the most progressive white-led organization in southern history.

Chapter III: World War II and the Years of Hope (1941-1946)

Shortly before the conference at Birmingham, H.C. Nixon, one of the original organizers of the Southern Conference, wrote to Francis Pickens Miller to emphasize the fact that the "Conference must make a mass appeal if it makes the grade at all."[127] Unfortunately for the Conference, Nixon's hope did not come to fruition. The first three years of the Southern Conference were a time of idleness. With the exception of the Civil Rights Committee and the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, the Southern Conference's many ambitious plans were left unrealized. Virginia Durr confessed years later that aside from the poll tax, she did not know what the Southern Conference did during the pre-war years. She thought the Conference existed solely to extinguish the poll tax. Most of its leadership had numerous other commitments and did not give the Southern Conference their full devotion. Frank Graham, the chairman of the organization, had heavy responsibilities as the president of the University of North Carolina and

[127] Sosna, In Search, 93.

the leading voice of liberalism in the South. Clark Foreman went back to work on the New Deal, devoting most of his energy as a director of the Division of Defense Housing. Southern Conference's chronic problem of inadequate funding prevented it from maintaining a working staff. From December 1938 to January 1940, the Conference collected a paltry sum of $1,963.48. H.C. Nixon, one of the few paid staff of the Conference, had to leave his post at the Conference for a teaching position because he could not live on what he was given; only Gelders, who declined the salary owed to him by the Conference, remained on the staff.

Due to its small budget, the Conference was forced to abandon its goal of hosting annual conferences and settled instead for biennial ones. The second conference at Chattanooga, Tennessee, with the theme of "Democracy in the South," was a more modest gathering lacking the star power of Birmingham and had fewer representatives from the upper-classes or the industrial elites. Southern Conference stalwarts like Eleanor Roosevelt and Frank Graham still made the trip in a show of support. Because of the SCHW's tight straits, the Chattanooga conference was in danger of not happening if not for last minute financial support from labor and the organizing skill of the CIO's spokesperson in the South, Lucy Randolph Mason.[128] The Chattanooga conference did not set out any new ambitious program or craft a different message from the Birmingham conference; instead it played up support for its anti-poll-tax campaign and urged members not to give up during this difficult time. Will Alexander, who was accepting the Thomas Jefferson Award, soberly asked members to be ready for a long-time job that called for "wisdom and patience and determination of the highest possible order."[129] Reality would test the

[128] Durr, Outside, 157; Foreman, interview, 61; Krueger, Promises to Keep 41, 51-54, 58-59; "First Lady To Address Human Welfare Parley," CD, April 14, 1940; Frank Young, "Welfare Meet Opens in Chattanooga," CD, April 20, 1940; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 156.
[129] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 59.

wisdom and patience of the leadership of the SCHW to their maximum. After the Chattanooga Conference was over, the SCHW was running a deficit of $550.[130]

The Southern Conference's difficulty did not stop at the apathy of the South and the busy schedules of its members, but extended to the loss of promised support from F.D.R.. President Roosevelt, whose leadership and New Deal programs the SCHW relied upon, was backing away from his domestic agenda as Europe became embroiled in a new great war. The SCHW "represented not so much the peak of the New Deal as the epilogue," wrote the historian George Tindall, "coming after the period of reform legislation and hard on the heels of the ill-fated purge." [131] With his eyes fixed on warring Europe, Roosevelt needed the support of the bellicose southern senators against the isolationist senators of the North and West. He could not afford to antagonize them over the poll tax or race issue. F.D.R.'s popularity and the prospect of war had prevented southern conservatives from directly attacking him, but his subordinates and his programs were easy targets. Opponents used the war as an excuse to scrap all non-war related agencies and direct resources elsewhere. From 1941 to 1943, the southern conservatives systematically abolished most of the New Deal agencies and purged many New Dealers from positions of power.[132] Although the President still sent his greeting to the Chattanooga conference, F.D.R. did little for the Southern Conference beyond letting his wife help the Conference. Even Roosevelt's promised support in the fight against the poll tax never materialized. Durr recounted a conversation with the First Lady in which Mrs. Roosevelt said that "as far as Franklin was concerned…he wasn't going to touch the poll tax with a ten foot pole….and she couldn't have any open part in it either. [Roosevelt] had changed from Dr. New

[130] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 81.
[131] Tindall, New South, 639.
[132] Tindall, New South, 689; Malcolm Cowley, "The End of the New Deal," New Republic, May 31, 1943, 729-33.

Deal to Dr. Win-The-War."[133] The Southern Conference lamented that by holding out on liberal programs Roosevelt had caused his supporters to become apathetic and his enemies more aggressive. But the nation's entry into World War II actually reignited the passion in the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and changed its declining fortunes and ineffective leadership.[134]

Frank Graham had never wanted the presidency of the Southern Conference. His duty at the University of North Carolina and as the most highly regarded spokesman of southern liberalism occupied most of his times. The Conference needed a big name to draw in supporters and fend off conservative attacks, but few candidates could command respect like Graham. Graham was unanimously elected to the post of president at the Birmingham conference. He accepted the position in order to give the young Conference the stability and respectability it desperately needed before it could find more active leadership. After the Chattanooga Conference, Graham and Foreman tried desperately to find a new president. The publisher of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Barry Bingham, was first approached. Bingham, however, doubted the future of the Southern Conference and turned down the offer. Next asked was Will Alexander, who was retiring from the Farm Security Administration, to be either executive secretary or the president of the Conference. Alexander, though intrigued by the offer, confessed that he had no "administrative urge" and would rather plant ideas and watch them grow than to tend them. Alexander turned down the offer and accepted a more lucrative vice president position at the Rosenwald Fund. In desperation, Graham approached the esteemed sociologist Howard Odum and asked him to become the executive secretary. Odum, who always had apprehensions about the Southern Conference and feared that advanced liberals were moving too

[133] Durr, interview, March 1975, 130-31.
[134] "The South's Responsibility for Republican Victories," Southern Patriot 2, no.1 (January. 1944): 1.

fast in their push for progress, declined Graham's offer. Almost by default the job went to John B. Thompson, the director of the Presbyterian Foundation at the University of Oklahoma. Foreman opposed Thompson's nomination criticizing him for lacking a vision and the strength to carry out the fight that the Southern Conference would engage in. Ultimately, Thompson was elected president by a meager 3-to-2 margin in mid 1940, and alongside him, Howard Lee was promoted in late 1939 from the executive secretary of the Council of Young Southerners to the executive secretary of the Southern Conference. As the doubters feared, Thompson and Lee did not have the ability to cure the Conference of its malaises, but let it drift into further needless division.[135]

The period of the Thompson's chairmanship and Lee's helm as the executive secretary was characterized by idleness, financial woes, and political controversies. Thompson and Lee were absorbed with their work at the American Peace Mobilization (APM), a coalition of anti-war activists, where Thompson was the chairman. Thompson and Lee often did not hold executive committee meetings or take any action with the SCHW's officers for months. In a letter to Thompson, Clark Foreman, who was then the treasurer of the Conference, expressed his frustration at the inactivity and the dire financial situation. Foreman also complained to Thompson and Lee about their unauthorized expenses and expressed dismay that he was not informed of them. Foreman's complaint went unanswered. Between December 1938 and August 1939, the Southern Conference collected less than a thousand dollars in donation. At one point its beggarly account had only $28.05 while owing more than $500. Howard Lee and Joseph Gelders, whose positions were the only paid ones in the Conference, had to forgo most of their already modest salaries for long periods of time. By August 1941, the SCHW owed Lee $221.36

[135] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 84; Reminiscences of Will Alexander, 634, 659-60; Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 228; Foreman, interview, 50; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 79.

and Gelders $1,470 in back salaries. Despite claiming to have seven thousand members, low financial contributions to the Conference indicated that the present membership base was not very dedicated.

Adding to the frustration were disturbing rumors that the APM was a Communist front, especially because APM called for the cessation of aid to Great Britain and a closer relationship with the Soviet Union. The Southern Conference, which faced communist charges of its own, could not afford the publicity that its chairman was so closely aligned to such a controversial group. Furthermore, the Chattanooga Conference had seen serious tension between the isolationists and the interventionists within the Southern Conference. The rift had not healed before Thompson publicly accepted the chairmanship of the APM. The last straw came when Thompson and Lee sent out a letter calling for support for the American Peace Mobilization, but using the letterhead of the Southern Conference. In it they identified the APM mission as closely aligned with that of the Southern Conference. The letter gave the impression to many within the Southern Conference that the organization had officially endorsed the American Peace Mobilization. Thompson's and Lee's action created an uproar among interventionists in the SCHW and those who distrusted the Communist influence of the APM.[136] Judge Louise Charlton, disturbed by the breakdown of unity, warned that the Southern Conference "must be either redirected along its original lines, or disbanded." A meeting of the executive committee was called on May 2, 1941 and Lee was put on indefinite administrative leave while Thompson was given a stern warning. Thompson would resign within a year.[137]

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[136] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 80-82, the full letter that Foreman sent to Thompson was reproduced in the Douty report; Reed, Simple Decency, 35-36; "Pick Oklahoman as Chairman of Peace Group," Chicago Daily Tribune, September 9, 1940; "A.M. Head 'Welcomes' Aid of Communists," WP, January 26, 1941; "500 Attend Rally Against Aid to Britain," WP, January 7, 1941; Frank T. Adams, James A. Dombrowski: An American Heretic, 1897-1983 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 135; the Thompson and Lee letter on behalf of the APM was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 85.

[137] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 97-98.

The replacements for Lee and later Thompson transformed the Southern Conference into a politically active organization following the war years and the tumultuous post-war years. James Dombrowski came to the Southern Conference at its lowest point and would preside over the organization during its highest point and most difficult years. Dombrowski was born in Tampa, Florida in 1897, the fourth child of a jeweler. His placid and normal life was greatly disturbed by the First World War. As a volunteer in the ambulance service, Dombrowski encountered the suffering the dead and dying and the stark distinction between white and black soldiers. From African-American servicemen Dombrowski learned that fighting in the Great War was not for them a patriotic thing to do, but an escape from the South, where their futures were bleak and a chance to get three square meals a day. Life as a jeweler lost its appeal and Dombrowski determined that he would do something to help people in need. He attended Emory University and after his graduation he spent years wandering through different universities before finally getting a joint Ph.D. in history from Columbia and Union Theological Seminary. Dombrowski's journeys during those years educated him on the suffering and powerlessness of the common laborers. He slowly moved away from the Methodist Church and toward Christian Socialism and the teachings of social gospel reformers Reinhold Niebuhr and Harry Frederick Ward. Dombrowski devoted his dissertation on the early days of American Christian Socialism. After getting his doctorate, he joined his friend from his Union Theological Seminary days, Myles Horton, founding the Highlander Folk School in Monteatle, Tennessee. Highlander became a training ground for many union and social activists in the South. Despite its advocacy that cooperation between black and white workers was crucial to the labor movement's success in the South, the residency program remained closed to African Americans. Members of the faculty danced around the issue of segregation delicately, but they would favor resolutions that were to

the satisfaction of white participants over black. Few in the Highland School were willing to confront the issue head on, leaving Dombrowski disillusioned with the institution. Frustrated, Dombrowski resigned in the winter of 1941 and turned to Virginia Durr for help. Soon Durr was in contact with Frank Graham and without hesitation Graham offered Dombrowski the post of executive secretary that Lee had recently vacated.[138]

The post of presidency was more difficult to fill. Homer P. Rainey, the President of the University of Texas, was initially tapped at the 1942 Conference in Nashville to replace John Thompson. Under pressure from the University of Texas's Board of Trustees, Rainey resigned his brief presidency. The Southern Conference's reputation as a radical interracial organization with Communist members did not sit well with the school's conservative board of trustees. With no one else to turn to and the Southern Conference in a desperate situation, Clark Foreman agreed to become the organization's president. By the time of his appointment, Foreman had been forced out of his position as the director of the Division of Defense Housing. Southern congressmen on the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds targeted Foreman for his refusal to convert the Sojourner Truth, a housing project for black defense workers, built near a predominantly Polish neighborhood, into whites only housing. Frank Boykin of Alabama threatened to withhold funding from Division of Defense Housing unless Foreman resigned. Once Foreman was gone, protests from the Mayor of Detroit, union leaders, and civil rights activists succeeded in keeping the project black despite threats of riots from the white residents. The Sojourner Truth incident served as one of many examples of the mounting racial tension produced by the growing rebelliousness of African Americans in their call for equal rights and economic opportunity. As the United States began to engage in the Second World War, it would be up to Dombrowski and Foreman to steer the Southern Conference off its path of self-

[138] Adams, Dombrowski, 5-18, 27-56, 59, 104-133; Glen, Highlander, 84-103, 108.

destruction and back to relevancy during some of the most tumultuous and transformative years in American history.[139]

World War II and its aftermath brought unprecedented economic and social changes to the South. One historian called the war a "great divide" separating the South into two halves: the pre-war half of unemployment, poverty, rural living and provincialism, and the post-war half of industrial development, a growing middle class, urbanization, and the breakdown of its moral isolation. The historian of the southern liberals, Morton Sosna, wondered if World War II was even more important to the South than the mythic Civil War. The war transformed the region from the country's number one economic problem to its number one economic opportunity. The transformation was helped by the defense industry, which was attracted to the region's cheap source of labor. More industrial plants, many of them financed by the federal government, were constructed in the country during the four years of the war than during the previous fifteen years. The growth of factories pushed manufacturing employment in the South up by 50 percent. In a region where wages were infamously pitiful, southerners saw their annual income increased by 40 percent. With such unheard of high wages, tenant farmers traded in their cotton bales for steel ingots. One estimate had 20 percent of the South's farm population left the land to work in the cities all across the region and the country. The wave of urbanization was unprecedented in the South's history. Between 1940 and 1944, the population of Mobile, Alabama jumped by 83,839 (or 64.7 percent) and Norfolk-Hampton Roads, Virginia saw its population increased by 165,760 (or 44.7 percent). To cope with the loss of almost 3.2 million people, southern farmers mechanized their production with the assistance of the federal government. The exodus out of

[139] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 102; Foreman, interview, 50-51; Alvin White, "Federal Chiefs, Fair To Negro, Being Forced Out," CD, January 24, 1942; "May Lose Detroit Housing Project to Whites," CD, January 24, 1942; "Tenants Win Fight for Detroit Project," CD, February 14, 1942; "Detroit Riot Issue Put Up to Capital," CD, March 2, 1942; "Indicts Three Whites in Detroit Housing Riots," CD, April 25, 1942; "Troops Keep Order At Detroit Project," CD, May 9, 1942.

rural farms was the beginning of the end of the South's long tradition of tenant farming. Although the South was still a poor and low-wage region at the end of the war, wartime needs had given it an expanding industrial labor pool and growing base of affluent consumers.[140]

The racial consequences of the war and its aftermath were as profound as the economic boom. Gunnar Myrdal, writing during the middle of the war, foresaw "a redefinition of the Negro's status in America as the result of this War."[141] The war brought the long simmering resentment of African Americans all across the country to full steam. Unlike World War I, where black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois advocated unity in order to demonstrate black loyalty and capability, African-American leaders in World War II did not advocate a closing of the ranks to support their country in its hour of crisis, but continued to airing their grievances. African Americans learned from the bitter lessons of World War I. They believed that once the crisis was over things would return to the way they were before. Injustices in the defense industry and discriminations in the arm forces provided the sparks that lit the fire of the militant spirit of African Americans. Despite the boom in the defense industry, black workers initially shared little in the growing prosperity. African Americans were often told by defense factories that only janitorial jobs were available. Countless excuses were made by employers to deny African Americans the jobs that the same factories fulfilled by busing white workers from other towns. The Army's treatment of its black recruits and soldiers was no less appalling. Black men who wished to serve their country were often excluded by the arbitrary caps on black enlistment.

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[140] Pete Daniel, "Going Among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II," The Journal of American History 77, no. 3 (December 1990): 886; Morton Sosna, "More Important than the Civil War?" The Impact of World War II on the South," in James C. Cobb and Charles R.Wilson, eds., Perspectives on the American South: An Annual Review of Society, Politics, and Culture, Vol.4 (New York and London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1987), 149-53; James C. Cobb, "World War II and the Mind of the Modern South," in Neil R. McMillen, ed., Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 5, 10; Neil A. Wynn , "The 'Good War': The Second World War and Postwar American Society," Journal of Contemporary History 31 , no. 3 (July 1996): 466; Daniel, "Going Among Stranger," 886, 889, 896-98.

[141] Myrdal, An American Dilemma, 997.

Those who managed to enter the service were often limited to menial duty like cooks and stewards. Black soldiers who actually saw action were segregated in all-black units and led mostly by white officers. There was only one black officer for every seventy black enlisted men, but one white officer for every seven white enlisted men. The discrimination African Americans experienced cut deeper than just external rejection. When they tried to fulfill their patriotic duty by giving desperately needed blood, they were told that their blood was not fit to save white soldiers. African Americans considered these rejections a mockery of their dignity as human beings by a country that was hypocritically wrapping itself within the cloak of righteousness and freedom.[142]

Throughout the country black communities were seething with resentment. "Negro's usual protests have become a mighty chorus of discord," said one amazed southern sociologist.[143] No longer docile and content with tokenism, many African-American communities began to demand more from America. The democratic message of the war emboldened many African Americans to hope for more. Black soldiers who had fought and suffered injury were keen to point out what their sacrifices were for. "After having been overseas fighting for democracy, I thought that when we got back here we should enjoy a little of it," one black Alabama soldier defiantly told a white registrar who was refusing to register him to vote.[144] There was a readiness to protest and openly express their grievances to the country. The spirit of militancy was embodied by the March on Washington Movement led by A. Philip Randolph. The threat of a hundred thousand

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[142] Kenneth B. Clark, "Moral of the Negro on the Home Front: World Wars I and II," Journal of Negro Education 12, no.3 (Summer 1943): 420-21; Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," The Journal of American History 55, no. 1 (June 1968): 91-92; Roi Ottley, "Negro Resentment," " in Clayborne Carson and others, eds., Reporting Civil Rights, Part One (New York: Library of America, 2003), 5-10, reprinted from the New Republic, November 10, 1941; Daniel, "Going Among Stranger," 893; President's Committee, To Secure These Rights, 41, 45, 44.

[143] H. C. Brearley, "The Negro's New Belligerency," Phylon 5, no. 4 (4th Qtr., 1944): 341.

[144] Reminiscences of Alexander, 266; the quote is from Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," Virginia Law Review 80, no. 1 (February 1994): 17.

men descending on Washington got Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 to establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to ensure that companies with government contracts do not discriminate on the basis of race. [145] Although the FEPC never lived up to expectations, it was the first tangible result of black protest.[146] During the same period, the NAACP, which had been weakened by the Great Depression and competition with the Communist Party, experienced a Renaissance. From 1940 to 1945, the NAACP's nationwide branches tripled from 355 to 1,073, and its membership increased by eightfold, from 50,556 to 450,000. The civil rights organization also found successes in the South. At the end of the war, the South's membership jumped from 18,000 to 156,000. The NAACP would rely on this newfound strength, built during the war years, to meet the escalating demand of African Americans for equal rights and to pave way for its critical battles ahead.[147]

The growing fearlessness of African Americans was having effects on other fronts. During the spring and summer of 1939, despite the potential dangers, several hundred African Americans unsuccessfully tried to vote in Alabama. The NAACP aided a few dozen from the group to file three consecutive lawsuits against the board of registrars. Although rule against, they were ultimately vindicated. Prior to 1927, African Americans had been excluded from the Democratic primaries with impunity. Then in two lawsuits against the Texas Democratic Party, the Supreme Court held that the white primary violated the Fourteenth Amendment because the

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[145] Brearley, "Negro's New Belligerency," 339; Wynn, "The 'Good War,'" 471; March on Washington Committee, "Call to Negro America: 'To March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense,'" in Carson and others, eds., Civil Rights, 1-4, reprinted from The Black Worker (May 1941); Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years,'" 97-99.

[146] Despite the promise of F.D.R. and the creation of the FEPC, many defense jobs continued to be closed to blacks. A survey by the Bureau of Employment Security found that blacks would not be considered for 49 percent of the 282,245 job opening in February 1942. Black represented less than 3 percent of all workers during this period. Not until the late 1942 did job increased rapidly; see Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," The Journal of American History 60, no.3 (December 1973): 700.

[147] Adam Fairclough, "Louisiana: The Civil Rights Struggle, 1949-1954," in Glenn Feldman, ed., Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004),150-54; Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years,'" 99-100; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 141.

primary was a state function and thus was subjected to the Constitution. Undaunted, the Texas Democratic Party declared itself a private entity and maintained that the club was open to whites only. In *Grovey v. Townsend* (1935) the Court rewarded the perseverance of the Texas Democratic Party by ruling that the political party had sufficiently severed itself from the state and became a private organization.[148] In 1944, however, the Court reversed itself in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) and reasserted the position that because the membership of a party was a qualification to vote in a primary to select nominees for the general election, "the state makes the action of the party the action of the state," and therefore the Texas Democratic Party fell within the jurisdiction of the Fourteenth Amendment.[149] *Smith v. Allwright* inevitably led to more lawsuits to enforce the decision and to combat the inventive imagination of the southern legislatures, which relentlessly tried to discover new ways to circumvent the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the decision was a major milestone in the black enfranchisement movement.[150] Although they still had the poll tax and the literacy/civic exam to contend with, southern blacks had caught the political bug. In his travel through the South during the immediate postwar years, Robert Martin, a professor of government from Howard recounted that blacks all across the region expressed to him their political enthusiasm, "Us colored folks use to think that politics was white folks business. But now we feel like it's for us, too, that we have a right to be in it."[151]

Following the *Smith v. Allwright* decision, African-American voters' leagues sprung up all across the South, working in collaboration with other progressive organizations like the Southern Conference or labor unions, they helped educate hundred of thousand of southern black voters on

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[148] Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box," 224; Nixon v. Herndon, 273 U. S. 536 (1927) and Nixon v. Condon, 286 U. S. 73 (1932); Grovey v. Townsend, 295 U. S. 45 (1935).
[149] 321 U.S. 649, 664-65 (1944).
[150] "Negro Disenfranchisement. A Challenge to the Constitution Source," Columbia Law Review 47, no. 1 (January 1947): 77-88.
[151] Robert E. Martin, "The Relative Political Status of the Negro in the United States," The Journal of Negro Education 22, no. 3 (Summer 1953): 365.

the intricacies of registration, the issues on the ballots, and how to operate the voting machine. The NAACP also stepped up its drive to register and help with the poll taxes for African-American voters. Within two years there was a spectacular increase in black registration and voting. In 1940, an estimated 80,000 to 90,000 African Americans voted in the general election in the Deep South states and a quarter of a million total in all eleven southern states. The 1946 primary election saw southern black vote triple its 1938 number, passing 600,000 votes. By 1950 the number had jumped to 900,000. Although these numbers still represented only a third of the total potential voters, and many black voters remained disenfranchised by the poll tax and other means, progress had undeniably been made.[152] Howard Odum looked at the transformation in awe, "It is as if some universal message had reached the great mass of Negroes, urging them to dream new dreams and to protest against the old order."[153] And like Odum, many southern whites were taken by surprise by the sudden change in the southern blacks they had known so long. But African-American protest was a natural outcome of migration, urbanization, and education.

The revolt of African Americans against the status quo was not a spontaneous phenomenon, but a result of forces at work in the war. The mass migration of African Americans from rural areas to urban cities, which had begun during the early twentieth century, accelerated during the war years as promises of better work increased. One estimate contended that 17 percent of southern blacks moved to urban areas or out of the South altogether during the war. Migration changed the outlook African Americans had of themselves and their economic opportunity. They got the chance to go where they could never have gone before, to discover another way of life beyond the oppression of King Cotton, and as a consequence their

[152] Martin, "The Relative Political Status," 366-67; Key, Southern Politics, 598; Moon, Balance of Power, 186-87.
[153] Odum, "Social Change," 247.

expectations changed. Economically, African Americans benefited greatly from the war. Black unemployment fell from 937,000 in 1940 to 151,000 within four years. And despite discrimination, black employment in defense industries rose from 3 percent in 1942 to 8.3 percent at the end of 1944. The average income of black workers in urban areas more than doubled during the same period, even after factoring in the cost of living.[154]

Migration brought more than just economic security. African Americans moved from states where they could not vote to states where they would play an important role in Democratic Party politics. The shift in electoral demography meant that blacks, especially those from the North, were becoming an important constituent in a party that generations of southerners had sworn loyalty to. Their electoral power could be seen in President Truman's civil rights proposal and desegregation of the army, all designed to win him the crucial African-American vote in the 1948 presidential election.[155] Migration to the cities also led to better education than the decrepit and overcrowded country schools that African Americans were used to in the South. Education fostered in African Americans the idea that they were as worthy as any white American. "In subjecting Negroes to an American education we have made them Americans," Will Alexander explained to his fellow white southerners, "Their unrest…is [a] result not of sinister influence from outside, but of our education, which, with all its faults, is the best thing in our democracy."[156] The increase in the numbers of educated African Americans and their concentration in the cities led to the expansion of the black press, one of the most important

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[154] Despite the increase in pay for African-American workers, their wages were still lower than that of white workers. In 1942, the average hourly wage for unskilled black laborers was 47.4 cents, but 65.3 cents for whites. At the end of the war the average weekly income of white southern veterans was 30 to 78 percent higher than the average weekly income of black veterans. See President's Committee, To Secure These Rights, 57.

[155] Wynn, "The 'Good War'," 472; Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change," 20; Cobb, "World War II,"19; Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics," The Journal of Southern History 37, no. 4 (November 1971): 597-616; Moon, Balance of Power, 2, 11-12, 213-14; Odum, "Social Change," 243.

[156] Will W. Alexander, "Our Conflicting Racial Policies," Harper's, January 1945, 179.

agencies in forming and reflecting black thought. Black newspapers fostered a spirit of positive discontent among its primarily black readers. They fueled their readers' outrage with endless stories of discriminations of black men and women. They challenged their black audience not to be content with the tokenism that whites threw at them, but to demand what they were entitled to as citizens of the United States. The black press' defiant message found a receptive audience among disillusioned blacks during World War II. Black newspapers saw their weekly circulation increased from 1.265 million in 1940 to 1.809 million by the end of the Second World War.[157] One *Chicago Defender* columnist expressed that sentiment when he wrote, "Negroes know that if they don't get a chance to fight in this war like men, they won't be treated like men after the war."[158] The "Double V" campaign advocated by the black press sought to harness black frustration into energy to fight against the Nazi abroad and the conservatives at home. "We call upon the President and Congress to declare war on Japan and against racial prejudice in our country," declared the black paper *Pittsburg Courier*, "Certainly we should be strong enough to whip both of them."[159] The black press would use their transformative power to rally disaffected black civilians and soldiers to give everything they had to win the war and strengthen their postwar position. And with the "Double V," the black press held the country to a higher standard once the war was over.[160]

African-American protest did not exist in a vacuum of bitterness and resentment. Rebellions do not feed off hate alone, but commingle with the hope for a better day. The black sociologist Charles Johnson saw hope for the American creed even in the South. He rejected the

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[157]Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle and the Awakening of a Nation (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 5, 10; Charlotte G. O'Kelly, "Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827-1945," Phylon 43, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1982): 12-13; Roberts and Klibanoff, The Race Beat, 21.

[158] Charley Cherokee, "National Grapevine," Chicago Defender, Feb 19, 1944.

[159]Pittsburgh Courier, December 13, 1941.

[160] Finkle, "The Conservative Aims," 710-12.

notion that the South had a rigid caste system because a "true caste system is based on the acceptance by each individual of his place in the system….This pattern is ruled out in the American South by the basic democratic philosophy of the American creed.…[and this] creed has power enough in the South to make it impossible to exclude the Negro altogether from opportunities for education and self-advancement."[161] Despite the abuses and injustices they endured, African-American servicemen shared Johnson's optimism and hope. One study found that 41 percent of black soldiers expected to be better off as a result of their service compared to only 25 percent of whites. They had fought and died for the democratic principles of America, and they expected to share the fruit of their sacrifice when they returned home.[162]

When the nation went to war, the Southern Conference marched along with it. The Second World War was the Conference's chance to reinvent itself in the southern public's eyes. Before Pearl Harbor, the South, more than any other region in the country, was already overwhelmingly supportive of a possible war against the Fascist states. An October 1941 Gallup Poll revealed that 88 percent of the South agreed that Germany must be defeated while only 77 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans thought so. Furthermore, the war provided the Southern Conference with a moral argument against white racism and the hypocrisy of the South in oppressing its own people. Despite its financial difficulties, the Conference took a full-page advertisement in the Birmingham *News-Age Herald* denouncing racism as helping the Axis cause and pledging to Roosevelt the Conference's wholehearted support in winning the war. In September 1942, Dombrowski suggested that the Southern Conference publish a monthly newsletter to educate the southern public on the Conference's policies and the current progress of race relations in the region. The aim of the paper was to educate the southern public on

[161] Charles Johnson, "Social Changes and Their Effects on Race Relations in the South," Social Forces 23, no. 3 (March 1945): 346.
[162] Wynn, "The 'Good War,'" 473.

progressive ideals and to rebut conservative ideology rather than advocating directly for the Conference. The name Southern Patriot was chosen to reflect the Conference's "love of country." The *Southern Patriot* would become the Conference's most useful and important tool to defend itself against its critics and to craft and promote its policy to the public.[163]

The *Southern Patriot*, although it did not become a mass publication as it was hoped, was one of the most successful ventures the Southern Conference undertook. Foreman credited the paper for keeping the Southern Conference alive during the difficult war years when everyone was preoccupied with victory. The *Southern Patriot* developed a reputation as a reliable source of news on the progress of racial, economic, and political reforms in the South. The newsletter's insightful articles from influential editors, academic papers, and government reports became an important up-to-date source of information for many southern liberals and activists. Within three years of its first issue, *Southern Patriot* had a circulation of five thousand paid subscribers reaching seventeen thousands people. The newsletter also published its own original research in special editions and pamphlets. One special edition, "Segregation in Education," had 100,000 copies printed and 70,000 copies were widely circulated. [164]

Like its namesake, the *Southern Patriot* both put its full energy behind the war's effort and made the war work for it. Using the war as a stage, the paper would play both political watchdog against the southern conservatives and cheerleader for liberal programs it deemed necessary for victory.[165] In its inaugural issue the *Southern Patriot* assured to President

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[163] The Public Opinion Quarterly 6, no. 1 (Spring 1942): 150-51; Krueger, Promises to Keep 107-08; Adams, Dombrowski, 152.

[164] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 143; Adams, Dombrowski, 153; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 202; Reed, Simple Decency, 148.

[165] During the war years, the *Southern Patriot* saw many of the South's problems through the lens of victory in the war. Many of its headlines, with their colorful exaggerations, reflected its jingoistic spirit: "Southern 'Secessionists' Threaten War Unity" (SP 1, no.2, 1); "War Demands Expanding Food Production in South" (SP 1, no.5, 1); "Let' Em Eat Cotton: National cotton Council Fights Conversion to Food Production" (Vol.1, No.7, 1); "Army Rejects 750,000 For Literacy (SP 1, no.9, 1); and "To Filibuster in War Time is Treasonable" (SP 1, no. 10, 1).

Roosevelt that the Southern Conference is "watching the subversive efforts of irresponsible politicians who for selfish purposes are endangering the nation's war efforts. Deliberately inflamed race hate is slowing down war production and weakening the war unity of the South. These politicians are aiding Hitler by their efforts to provoke racial strife."[166] In return the paper asked that the South receive infrastructure investments, economic justice for the poor, and political empowerment for the ordinary workers. The challenge of economic development and industrial recovery weighed heavily on the South since its infrastructure remained the least developed of all the regions. The Conference feared that the economic boom created by the war would not be sustainable without more federal aid and intervention to maintain full employment. The poll tax would continue to disenfranchise poor voters, the low number of union workers in the South would keep workers in poverty, and race prejudices would continue to be inflamed by corporate interest in order to create competitions between the races and keep wages low. These problems would perpetuate the poor education and bad health care systems of the South. The Conference hoped that if the federal government took proactive steps to deal with these problems, then the South would not only turn a new page economically, but politically as well.[167] "The South is ripe for a political turnover," the *Southern Patriot* declared, "It will happen whenever the new army of industrial workers realizes the vast power within its reach, and when the poll tax system has been broken."[168] The Southern Conference was confident that, as the lot of the southern workers improved, the days of the conservative Democrats would be numbered. Without demagogues instigating race strife for their political advancement and economic competition creating tension, race relationships in the South would gradually improve.

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[166] Southern Patriot 1, no.1, (December 1942): 8.
[167] Helen Fuller, "The South and Congress," SP 2, no.5 (May 1944): 4; "Making the South Safe for Democracy," SP 2, no. 12 (December 1944,): 7; see also SP 3, no.6 (June 1945); SP 3, no.5 (May 1945); SP 3, no.7 (July 1945); SP 3, no.8 (August 1945); and SP 3, no.11 (November 1945).
[168] SP 1, no.8 (August 1943): 1.

With conservative southern Democrats defeated, progressive legislation could be enacted to end Jim Crow. To the Southern Conference social, economic, and political advancements were deeply intertwined. Success of one could not be realized without attainment of the other two. The euphoria the nation experienced at the end of the Second World War gave the Conference hope that the country was ready to turn a new page of progress.[169]

After the war ended, SCHW faced a changed environment and a different set of expectations. The repeated death of the anti-poll tax bill in the Senate at the hand of the conservative Democrats forced the Conference to modify its strategy from top down change to an emphasis from the bottom up. The Conference would restart its South-focus mission and begin a new political campaign against conservative Democrats. In order to preserve the economic gains the South made during the war and to build a base for political mobilization, the Conference closely aligned itself with labor unions, especially those of the CIO. It became increasingly dependent on the CIO for the funds it needed to carry out its ambitious agenda. The growing activism and expectation of the African Americans challenged the Southern Conference to expand further its civil rights advocacy. The Conference would take on increasingly advanced racial positions, eventually coming out against segregation in 1946.

With victory over the Axis powers achieved, a new found optimism enveloped the country. A brighter economic future brought a "new social ferment" to the South. Southerners felt that demagoguery was in decline and the region was entering a "new climate" of racial harmony and accommodation.[170] "There seems to be a bottom deep awakening," Aubrey Williams, a Southern Conference executive committee member, rejoiced, "a breakup of the thick shed that has for decades covered the South; a stirring, or to use a good southern term of 50 years

[169] "South Prospers When All Get Fair Chance, SCHW Tells Senate," SP 3, no. 3 (March 1945): 5.
[170] SP 3, no. 2 (February 1945): 1; Numan V. Bartley, The New South, 1945-1980 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 38.

ago, a refreshing. An unmistakable assertion of decency and a turning on people who live by exploiting hatred, religious bigotry by trading in people's prejudices and fears."[171] The spirit of racial optimism was reflected in the youth of the nation. One survey of college students after the war found that almost half wanted the end of discrimination of African Americans in restaurants, hotels, and public places, versus 32 percent opposing, and 68 percent supported ending discrimination in schools and universities. The Southern Conference believed that a new day had dawned on the South. It was confident that behind the fierce and noisy cry of the conservatives, there was a new "Silent South" that needed to be urged to speak and act. The *Southern Patriot* broadly and vaguely defined this new "Silent South" as southerners who rejected the backward looking and divisive policy of the conservative Democrats and embraced the forward looking policy of Thomas Jefferson and Franklin Roosevelt. The Conference believed that the progressive "Silent South" was composed of the returning veterans whose sacrifices in the war had raised the expectation they had for their region and for their country.[172]

The war's destructiveness caused many soldiers to look for a higher purpose to justify their sacrifices. The war had magnified the value of freedom that these southerners had taken for granted. Having shared those sacrifices with black soldiers, the racial outlook of many white veterans had been irrevocably altered. There were no colors during combat. The white soldiers were just as afraid of death as the black soldier, who also fought just as valiantly. [173] "I found out after I did some fighting in this war that the colored boys fight just as good as the white boys," the highly decorated Lt. Van T. Barfoot told a red-faced Senator Theodore Bilbo, "I've changed

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[171] John A. Salmond, "'Flag-bearers for integration and Justice': Local Civil Rights Groups in the South, 1940-1954," in Glenn Feldman, ed., Before Brown, 222-23.
[172] Albert William Levi, "Social Beliefs of College Students," The Journal of Higher Education 15, no. 3 (March 1944): 131; "George W. Cable-Democrat Spokesman for 'The Silent South,'" SP 2, no. 6 (June 1944): 4; "Liberal Editors in the South," SP 2, no.7 (July 1944): 3; Carleton, "The Conservative South," 179-92.
[173]Jason Sokol, There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of the Civil Rights, 1945-1975 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 22.

my ideas a lot about colored people since I got into this war and so have a lot of other boys from the South."[174] Another veteran, Harold Fleming, a native Georgian who was put in charge of a black company witnessed firsthand the debased treatments that black soldiers had to endure from white soldiers. "Here they are being called on to follow the rules, shape up, be a good soldier, work your ass off, be ready to die for your country," Fleming recounted, "and then they would crap all over you without apology."[175] Fleming, who was ambivalent about race before he entered the war, had a conversion. His shared traumatic experience with the men who served under him motivated Fleming to join the Southern Regional Council, an interracial organization, to fight for the rights of African Americans. Other white veterans followed his footsteps. Many of them joined organizations like the American Veteran Committee where white and black veterans worked together to secure their G.I. benefits. In Georgia, white and black veterans created the Georgia Veterans for Majority Rule to overturn the county-unit system, which gave a disproportionate representation to rural counties, the bedrock of Georgia demagogues. This newfound interracial cooperation did not mean, however, that all white veterans returned to the South with a change of heart. The majority of white southern veterans believed that the war had been fought to preserve the customs and racial mores of the South, not to overturn them. Black veterans who believed they had honorably earned their rights were confronted with the same barriers they thought they had left behind. Some of the most reactionary postwar organizations, the Columbians, the KKK, and White Citizens' Council, drew their members from war veterans.[176] Nevertheless, the sociologist Guy B. Johnson saw in the change of attitude a

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[174] Egerton, Speak Now, 327.
[175] Harold Fleming, interview with John Egerton, January 24, 1990, interview A-0363, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 27.
[176] Fleming, interview, 21, 29-32; Jennifer E. Brooks, "Winning the Peace: Georgia Veterans and the Struggle to Define the Political Legacy of World War II," The Journal of Southern History 66, no. 3 (August 2000): 572-80, 565-58; Sokol, There Goes, 23; Cobb, "World War II," 7.

glimmer of hope for interracial cooperation. Johnson noted that "the majority of our fighting men have had experiences which have taught them a new appreciation of their fellow Americans of another race."[177] The Southern Conference would seek to harness this new spirit of progressivism and optimism and turn it into political power, to preserve the gains made by workers during the war by expanding labor unions within the region, and finally, to bring about a new age of race relationships within the South by working closely with African Americans.

After the fierce and ultimately futile battles against conservative Democrats in the Senate over the poll tax, the Southern Conference reached the conclusion that the current status quo of the Democratic Party could not continue. The party simply could not remain "half-liberal-half-reactionary."[178] The conservatives Democrats had undermined New Deal social reform and continued to be a major threat to postwar liberalism. The *Southern Patriot* saw the attempt by some conservative Democrats to deny Roosevelt the South's electoral college votes during the 1944 election as a "Great Conspiracy" to destroy liberalism. The apocalyptic tone of the *Southern Patriot* might have been exaggerated, but the incident was one of the growing signs that a conservative backlash was beginning to take form in the South. Although the war had brought together black and white southerners in the battlefields and showed that the two races were capable of working together in the face of adversity, the feeling of cooperation after World War II might turn into bitterness and rivalry if it was not channeled into something positive. With World War II coming to an end and Roosevelt's health in decline, the Southern Conference believed that it imperative to mobilize a southern liberal front against the conservative tide. Foreman was confident that the economic prosperity during the postwar years and the growing liberalism of the younger generation had built the foundation for a renewed interracial activism.

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[177] Sokol, There Goes, 20.
[178] "The South's Responsibility for Republican Victories," SP 2, no. 1 (January 1944): 2.

In a report done by Foreman and Dombrowski for the CIO's National Citizens Political Action Committee (NCPAC), the pair argued that the racist South did not represent the majority of the South. With only twenty percent of the South's potential voting pool going to the polls, southern liberals needed to fight for the enforcement of the Supreme Court's decision against white primaries and to continue its work against the poll tax; but more importantly, they needed to mobilize the moderates, liberals, and progressives in the South for political action. And the first place to start was to be the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.[179]

The Southern Conference's strategy for mobilizing the South marked its retreat from its sole reliance on the federal government. The Conference saw three ways to protect citizens' constitutional rights: federal laws and prosecution, civil suits in the courts, and organized pressure. The Conference's experience with its failed litigation in the *Pirtle* case and the futile battle against the poll tax had soured it on the first two approaches. Federal laws could be effective in stopping the civil rights abuses in the South, but the Conference contended that the difficulty lay in putting enforcement in the hands of U.S Attorneys who often prosecuted half-heartedly or not at all and federal grand juries who refused to indict. Federal laws would only work if there was "a constant, alert and determined demand for their enforcement." The potential for enforcement was unrealized, however, as comprehensive reforms could not survive the parliamentary tactics of southern conservatives in Congress. Civil suits, the preferred course of the NAACP, were expensive and required the collective resources of many individuals and organizations. Furthermore, as the example of the South's defiance against the Supreme Court's white primary decision had shown, the effectiveness of any judicial ruling depended on the

[179] SP 2, no. 5 (May 1944): 4; SP 2, no. 6 (June 1944): 5; "'This is Not Politics—This Is Treason': Electoral College Plot Condemned," SP 2, no. 7 (July 1944): 1; Editorial, SP 2, no.1 (January 1944): 3; Clark Foreman, "SCFHW in Postwar American," SP 2, no. 6 (June 1944): 5; Ramona Lowe, "South Essentially Liberal, Believes Clark Foreman," CD, April 7, 1945; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 144; Sullivan, Days of Hope 187-89.

South's willingness to comply along with the ruling and the federal government's willingness to enforce it. The Southern Conference believed the most effective method was organized public pressure and the expansion of the southern electorate. Only by having southern voters demanding change would politicians enact necessary legislation and the courts' rulings be respected. It was time for the Conference to test its faith in the common southerners with an unprecedented political mobilization to oust the conservative Democrats.[180]

The Southern Conference's postwar political mobilization was not the first attempt by southerners to shake up the political foundation of the region. Nineteenth century southern populists had attempted similar reforms. The Conference's attempt, however, was the first effort made by an organization composed of respectable and highly educated middle-class professionals: educators, lawyers, New Dealers, clergymen, labor activists, and journalists—individuals who projected the image of the privileged class of the New South and not a band of starving tenant farmers rebelling against their landlord or factory workers striking against their employers. Although organized labor would come to provide much of the Southern Conference's financial resources, it was nevertheless an interracial white middle-class led movement. Previous interracial middle-class organizations like the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Policy Committee had steered clear of politics, preferring the safety of planning and discussion or gradualist, white-controlled improvements. These cautious organizations, fearing the loss of their social standing and economic repercussion, never engaged in political mobilization of the southern people. The SCHW's political campaign was thus unique in southern history, defying the convention of preceding southern interracial organizations and traditional southern liberalism, by trying to empower the common people with the power of the ballot.

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[180] "Our Democratic Rights—and How to Enforce Them," SP 4, no.3 (March 1946): 3.

Clark Foreman and James Dombrowski envisioned a popular mass membership movement led by the Southern Conference. The Conference's first task would be to establish state committees that could operate on their own and begin to change their respective states from within. They pushed through the creation of local state committees in all of the southern states. These state committees were charged with carrying out the Conference's political ambitions and expanding its influence on the southern public in each state. To accomplish their political goals, state committees' primary strategy was to expand the voter roll within their states, register African-American voters in large number, and seek out progressive candidates to challenge entrenched conservatives. From 1944 to early 1946, the Conference had set up eleven state committees in the South and two associate committees in Washington D.C. and New York. There were early promising signs that the mass membership movement was picking up momentum. The Conference recruited 336 new members during the month of December 1945, and the number jumped to 967 in January 1946. It continued to grow rapidly each month, hitting 1177 new members in March and 1220 by April. The four most successful committees in term of political mobilization and membership growth were the Committee for North Carolina, Committee for Georgia, the Alabama Committee, and the Washington D.C. Committee. Each committee was relatively autonomous and tackled different political issues pertinent to its state.[181]

The Committee for Georgia was founded in January 1945 to unite the liberal middle-class forces in the state to create a political climate conducive to progressive social and economic

[181] Foreman, interview, 53; Adams, Dombrowski, 164; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 144; Durr, interview, March 1975, 178; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 129; SP 3, no.12 (December 1945): 7; SP 4, no.2 (February 1946): 7. A sample of the breakdown of which state committee was growing the most during April 1946: Georgia led the states with 745 new members, North Carolina is next with 729, Tennessee 716, Virginia 233, SC 111, Florida 101, Texas 63, Alabama 57, Louisiana 49, Mississippi 29, Kentucky 25, Oklahoma 21 and Arkansas was the smallest with only 18 new members. Washington with 175 new members and New York with 594 have only associate members; see SP 4, no. 5 (May 1946): 8.

legislation. Under the competent and energetic leadership of Margaret Fisher, the Committee for Georgia tackled the minimum wage, Georgia's defiant retention of the white primary, the poll tax, and a permanent FEPC. It published newsletters and pamphlets educating Georgians on the need for the expansion of suffrage and on the procedures for voting in the state. Living up to the Southern Conference's mandate of political mobilization, the Georgia Committee and its field secretary, Osceola McKaine, helped increased the number of Georgia's eligible black voters in Savannah from 900 to 19,000 and in Augusta, from 1,200 to 4,900. The gains were impressive considering the stiff resistance put up by white registrars.[182] McKaine observed that the growing number of black voters would enable white moderates and liberals to be "more vocal, more consistent and more steadfast in their efforts to bring democracy to Dixie."[183] As part of its campaign to expand voter base, the Georgia Committee involved itself heavily in the work of repealing the state's poll tax. When Georgia became the fourth southern states to abolish its poll tax in 1945, the chairman of the Georgia State Industrial Union Council of the CIO praising the Georgia Committee for its work and declared that no other agency in the entire state had done more than the committee on repealing the poll tax. The Georgia Committee also actively campaigned for the progressive programs of liberal Governor of Georgia, Ellis Arnall and quietly supported New Dealer Helen Douglas Mankin's bid to win the congressional seat vacated by Robert Ramspeck, the House majority whip. At the same time, it was fielding two test suits against the Georgia county unit system that ultimately failed. Outside of politics, the Georgia Committee helped black schools secure a $4,000,000 share of bonds issued for education, a threefold increase from the original $1,000,000 allotted. Within a few short years, amidst a

[182] Salmond, Miss Lucy, 161; SP 3, no.11 (November 1945): 8; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 131-32, 145; Adams, Dombrowski, 164; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 202.
[183] Sullivan, Days of Hope, 202.

whirlwind of activities, the Committee for Georgia established itself as the most effective organization within the Southern Conference.[184]

The Committee for North Carolina, formed in November 1945, was slightly different from the Georgia Committee in its emphasis. North Carolina Committee's leader, Mary Price, a native of the state and an experienced organizer, pushed the Committee to cultivate a close relationship with labor unions to improve the substandard living and working conditions of the people, to increase in the minimum wage, and to lobby for equal educational facilities. When North Carolina considered a "Right to Work" bill, which would have curtailed labor's attempt to unionize in factories, the Committee immediately sprang to action and rallied support against it. In a piece of theatric, the Committee presented the Speaker of the Senate of North Carolina with an 80-fot long petition against the bill. Labor unions were willing to work closely with the North Carolina Committee on many issues, but despite Price's courting, no labor unions formally endorsed the committee. The CIO, in the midst of organizing its "Operation Dixie," a massive campaign to unionize the South, did not want to antagonize southern politicians the way the Southern Conference was doing. Despite labor's cold shoulder, The Committee for North Carolina continued to cooperate with unions in its political work. The Committee often teamed up with local unions to educate voters on the positions of candidates for elections, registered new voters, and worked to lower the voting age to 18. Thanks to Price's leadership and the state's

[184] James Dombrowski, "The Southern Conference for Human Welfare," Common Ground 6 (Summer 1946): 24; Salmond, "Flag-bearers," 223. Krueger, Promises to Keep, 145. The historian Morton Sosna, in his seminal work on southern liberals, In Search of the Silent South, criticized the Georgia Committee for contributing little to the repeal of the poll tax in the state. The Georgia Committee was being "conspicuously quiet" during the fight between the forces of progressive Ellis Arnall and racist Eugene Talmadge over the poll tax. The Georgia Committee, however, preferred to operate behind the scene when it came to potentially damaging political battles. It did not want to jeopardize its long term viability over one skirmish. The Georgia Committee's tendency to be behind the scene when it came to directly endorsing the election of a particular liberal candidate or a faction in political battles frustrated Clark Foreman's broader political ambition for the Southern Conference.

history of progressivism, the North Carolina Committee became the largest state committee within the Southern Conference with over 1,500 members.[185]

Founded in 1944, the Alabama Committee, more than the Georgia or North Carolina committees, focused its energy on political organization. As one of the first state committees, the Alabama Committee followed closely the directive of the Southern Conference and spent its energy registering black voters and building a liberal coalition of Roosevelt Democrats within the state. Unlike the other state committees, the Alabama Committee took steps to establish local chapters in every part of the state. Politically, the committee strongly aligned itself with the progressive Alabama Governor, James Folsom, and claimed credit for his election in 1946 when it got Folsom 90 percent of the modest number of black votes cast. When the Alabama legislature tried to circumvent the Supreme Court's decision against the white primary by proposing the Boswell Amendment to the voters, which would give local registrars power to determine the qualification of voters, the Alabama Committee set out in force to thwart amendment. But, despite its vigorous campaigning, the amendment was passed by 53 percent of the voters. Under the leadership of Aubrey Williams, the Alabama Committee, though in the Deep South, gained a reputation for being the most progressive of all the state committees. Its reputation made it difficult to operate within ultra-conservative and highly violent Alabama. Edith Mitchell Dabbs, a close friend of Virginia Durr and a member of the Alabama Committee, recounted that the location and date of meetings were kept in secret until meeting time, which was often at night. The places of meeting were often poorly lit on the outside and curtains draped

[185] SP 3, no. 11 (November 1945): 8; SP 4, no. 2 (February 1946): 7; SP 5, no. 2 (March 1947): 6; "North Carolina Campaigns for the Rights of Labor," SP 5, no, 3 (April1947): 3; Patricia Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers: New Deal Politics and Civil Rights Reform, 1933-1948" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1983), 134-35; SP 4, no. 5 (May 1946): 8; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 146. The North Carolina, despite its accomplishments, did not match the work of the Georgia Committee because it was found almost a year later and operated during the difficult year of 1946. By this time the support from unions, which had been crucial to the operation of the Southern Conference and the state committees, had been severely diminished. The damage the Southern Conference because of the withdrawn support of labor will be examined in greater details in the following chapter.

over the windows. Members often took turns exiting the building after the meeting was over in order not to draw attention by leaving in a crowd. In spite of the dangers involved, the Alabama Committee did not moderate its position. When a local CIO endorsed "Bull" Connor's 1944 re-election bid as Birmingham police commissioner, the Alabama Committee, appalled by Connor's atrocious record of abuses, threatened to break with the CIO. Dombrowski, fearing that the incident would jeopardize the Southern Conference's relationship with the national CIO, advised the Alabama Committee against taking a public stance in the matter. The Committee reluctantly acquiesced to Dombrowski's wish.[186]

Because of the city's high concentration of southern New Dealers in city, the Washington D.C. Committee became one of the first committees established by the Southern Conference and remained its sole non-state affiliate. Unlike the previous three committees, the D.C. Committee combined fundraising prowess with the political activism. Although it had only 300 members, by situating in the nation's capital, the D.C. Committee gave the Southern Conference access to the national press corps, political leaders, and sources of funding. It often acted as the Conference's lobbying arm in federal issue and hosted monthly luncheons which drew influential labor, newspaper, and political speakers. One fundraising dinner honoring Justice Hugo Black included Mrs. Roosevelt and four other Supreme Court Justices. Thus unlike the state committees which had to struggle to gain legitimacy within their communities, the D.C. Committee had the direct sympathetic ear of many of Washington liberal figures. Even during the difficult year of 1947 when the rest of the Southern Conference was facing a backlash from the growing reactionaries, the Washington Committee was able to raise $33,000, which was double what the rest of the

[186] SP 3, no. 12 (December 1945): 7; James A. Salmond, A Southern Rebel: The Life and Times of Aubrey Willis Williams, 1890-1965 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 222; Salmond, "Flag-bearers," 224; Vera Chandler Foster, "'Boswellianism': A Technique in the Restriction of Negro Voting," Phylon 10, no. 1 (1st Qtr. 1949): 29; Dabbs, interview, 43-45; Adams, Dombrowski, 167.

Conference could manage. Without the pressure of political organizing and compromising in the Deep South, the D.C. Committee was unrestrained in its demands for the end of discrimination in travel, recreation, and education and was the first local committee to call for the end of segregation in 1946.[187]

Other than the four major ones, the other committees made some public relations gains, but had tremendous difficulty gaining political traction. The New York Committee's sole contribution was to raise funds for the Southern Conference from northern foundations and liberals. It hosted fundraising parties and rallies in New York with celebrities like the up-and-coming Frank Sinatra, the actor Orson Welles, and the boxing champion Joe Louis. Louis drew over 3,000 spectators to one rally and raised a thousand dollars for the event by auctioning off his necktie and handkerchief. The New York Committee's "Lend a Hand to Dixieland" campaign ambitiously promised to raise $100,000 for the Southern Conference. Although the Committee's fundraising never reached six figures, it was nevertheless a crucial source of revenue. Political successes, however, proved elusive. The Virginia Committee, founded in January 1946, valiantly struggled in a futile campaign to defeat Harry Byrd in the state's 1946 senatorial primary. The Committee for Tennessee, formed in Nashville on May 18, 1946 with the mission of raising the living standards of the people of the state, got into a similar losing political skirmish with Senator Kenneth McKellar during his reelection bid. The Tennessee Committee was mercilessly vilified by the conservative Nashville *Banner* as a minion of the CIO and Communists for its opposition against McKellar. The short lived Florida's Fourth Congressional District Committee tried to fight the white primary legislation in Florida to little avail.

[187] Durr, Outside, 153; Adams, Dombrowski 155, 165; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 132; Krueger, Promises to Keep 134-35, 146.

Committees in Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Oklahoma did little of significance.[188]

The state committees' political campaigns were long shot experiments. The Southern Conference, being one of the first regional organizations to involve itself politically, did not have a blueprint to follow. There were debates within the Conference leadership about how big a role the mother organization should have in the strategic planning and operation of the state committees. Foreman favored strong centralized control over its state committees. James Dombrowski and the writer Lillian Smith, however, wanted the committees to be autonomous. argued that it was the state committees who knew best which local issues to tackle and the approaches to take. Foreman pointed out, however, that with the exception of Washington D.C., the state committees were not financially sustainable without substantial subsidy from the Southern Conference. In 1945, the Georgia Committee alone took more than $11,000 from the SCHW and $25,000 was budgeted for 1946. For these investments Foreman believed that the Southern Conference should have some control over the affair of the committees. The controversy about centralization, combined with money problems, would later lead to the demise of the separate state committees.[189]

The Southern Conference's regional strategy for mobilization was different from the marching, boycotting, and civil disobedience that would later characterize the Civil Rights

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[188] SP 4, no. 9 (Oct. 1946): 8; "Mayor Aids Dixie Drive," NYT, September 19, 1946; "Pepper, Louis to Speak," NYT, September 19, 1946; "Louis at Rally to Aid Southern Welfare," NYT, September 20, 1946; SP 4, no. 2 (February 1946): 7; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 205; SP 4, no. 6 (June 1946): 8; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 147; "Florida Girds to Protect Universal Franchise," SP 5, no. 3 (April 1947): 2. Although the Florida Committee failed to make a difference against the white primary, the Southern Conference would try again in March 1947 when Florida's segregationist legislatures tried to curb the growing electoral power of African Americans with a new white primary bill. Dombrowski spent three months in Florida organizing the opposition and managed to create a coalition of four hundred liberal legislators, lawyers, and ministers to protest the bill. The protest was effectively and helped emboldened the bill's opponents to defeat it. Floridian paper credited the Southern Conference for defeating the regressive bill. See Adams, Dombrowski, 179 and "Hail Defeat Of Florida 'White Primary' Bill," CD, May 31, 1947.

[189] Adams, Dombrowski, 164-65.

Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was also similar in its campaign to enfranchise the southern electorate, educate them on the issues, and then mobilize public opinion behind a particular cause. The strategy stemmed from the Conference's faith in the moral imperative of the southern people. The Conference believed that because their goodness and decency, the southern people would not knowingly let injustice continue to plague their beloved region. The Conference's task, then, was not to show the region the ugly consequence of its action with street protests, but to get them to speak in a unified voice against what was keeping the South back. One example of the SCHW's strategy was its involvement in the preservation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission, the federal agency established by Roosevelt to combat discrimination in the defense industry. The Conference worked with its southern committees to organize meetings across nine southern cities to raise awareness and support for the endangered agency. It urged its members and supporters to register publicly their protest by writing to their representatives in Congress and to newspapers demanding an end to the filibuster in the Senate. The SCHW itself advertised its defense of the FEPC in southern newspapers and released a 4,000 signature petition asking that the bill to renew the FEPC be brought to a vote in the Senate. To further demonstrate that the southern people were behind its effort, the Southern Conference frequently published opinion polls stating majority support for its program and circulated them among southern newspapers. The Conference asked the people of Georgia to mobilize against the reinstitution of the white primary with "public protest and pressure," calling it the best weapon instead of filing needless and slow-moving law suits that would be ignored by southerners who were not engaged in the process. By educating the southern populace and registering voters, the SCHW hoped to build a mass movement of informed voters who had a stake in the welfare of their region.[190]

[190] "Seven Good Reasons Bilbo Fears SCHW," SP 4, no.2 (February 1946): 3; SP 3, no. 7 (July 1945): 7; "Thou

At the same time, the Southern Conference made use of its official organ to rail against conservative Democrats. Dombrowski, as the editor of the *Southern Patriot*, stepped up his attack against white supremacist politicians like Senators James Eastland and Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi in the paper. Dombrowski frequently raised, to the point of cliché, the charge of treason against southern reactionaries for working for special interests instead of the people, for ruling the South as a de facto fascist state, and for opposing the national administration's attempt to fix the region's problems. Yet, although the Southern Conference carried on one of the most vigorous campaigns against conservative southern Democrats during the immediate postwar years, it never took its activism to the street and it never became the mass mobilization that Dombrowski and Foreman had hoped for. Despite the Conference's hope and urging, white progressives in Mississippi did not step up to support black Mississippians who were mapping out a plan for public protest and civil suit. There was never a white plaintiff filing suit against the poll tax or the white primaries. Although its will was there, the Southern Conference simply did not have the organizational ability, the man power, or the financial means like the CIO or the NAACP to carry out a prolonged and exhausting campaign.[191] But most importantly its campaign to change the political heart and mind of southerners could not sustain itself long enough to make a deep impact on the region. Nevertheless, the contribution made by the Southern Conference toward voter registration and education did make a big impression. V. O. Key praised the Southern Conference as "one of the more conspicuous agencies in exciting the electorate" during the postwar years. [192] Even if it was only for a brief moment, the Southern Conference did offer up the possibility of an internally reformed South.

Shalt Not Vote…," SP 5, no. 3 (April 1947): 1.
[191] "Eastland and Bilbo Don't Speak for South, Say Southern Editors," SP 3, no. 8 (August 1945): 7; "The Right to Vote," SP 3, no. 4 (April 1946): 5.
[192] Key, Southern Politics, 657.

The state committees represented only one half of the Southern Conference's overall political strategy. The other part dealt with the unionization of the South. The SCHW, since its beginning, had an especially close tie with organized labor. From the poll tax to the political campaigns of the state committees, the Conference's activities had revolved around the economic improvement and the political mobilization of the southern working class. Without a strong union foundation in the region to keep wages high and the people voting pro-labor candidates, who were often more progressive than the usual southern politicians, then the Conference's efforts would be in vain. Organized labor was thus a natural ally to the SCHW's cause. The close relationship between the Conference and the CIO was further enhanced by the close tie that Dombrowski and Foreman shared with the leadership of the union federation. Dombrowski's involvement with the Highland Folk School gave him extensive contacts with labor leaders all across the country. Foreman built a close friendship with Sidney Hillman, the head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and Philip Murray, the president of the CIO, while working for CIO's Political Action Committee and the National Citizens Political Action Committee. Through their ties with Foreman, the two helped raise funds for the Southern Conference. Foreman envisioned the relationship between labor and the Southern Conference as more than just a patron-client one. He wanted to unite SCHW, the AFL, and the CIO to form the most powerful progressive front in the postwar period. Foreman gave the AFL and the CIO each three seats on the executive committee of the Southern Conference.[193] The CIO returned the favor when at a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, representatives from nine southern states endorsed the Southern Conference "as the natural agency of the South itself to spearhead the liberal forces to the Region."[194] The representatives pledged to support the Conference in its

[193] Adams, Dombrowski, 137; Foreman, interview, 72-74; Bartley, The New South, 39.
[194] SP 3, no. 9 (September 1945): 8.

efforts to achieve a democratic, progressive, and prosperous South. The Southern Conferences Vice President, Paul R. Christopher, was named a representative of the CIO-PAC. After the public endorsement from CIO, the unions stepped up their donation to the Southern Conference. The money from labor would fuel the SCHW's political campaign and the creation of its state committees.

Unions had since the beginning played a critical role in keeping the Southern Conference afloat financially. After the sorry state of the Conference under the poor management of Howard Lee and John Thompson, the organization was only able to avoid a complete collapse thanks to the thrifty management of James Dombrowski and the infusion of money from organized labor and foundations. In August of 1942, the Southern Conference reported its healthiest surplus yet, $3,000 in cash. The Conference ended up collecting a total of $15,000 for the year. The situation worsened in 1943, however, and the SCHW's income was less than $8,000. But the Conference recovered in 1944 and collected over $17,000, with almost quarter of it coming from the unions. It was not until 1945 that the budget of the Southern Conference exploded by more than fourfold to more than $86,000, a third of which came from the unions. As fast as the money was flowing in, it could not keep it up with the Southern Conference's growing expenses. The state committees, which were partially created to help the mother organization with its financial problems by expanding the membership base to collect more dues, were now dependent on the Conference for subsidy. Feeling that the Conference was finally gaining its financial momentum, the executive committee ambitiously proposed to increase the budget by 41 percent to $121,730 for 1946 to broaden the political reaches of the Southern Conference. 1946 would prove to be the best year financially and membership wise, with the revenue rising to $116,844 and the total membership expanding to 6,000. The SCHW's financial triumph, however, had a dark portent.

Although missing its budget target by only five thousand dollars, the Conference ended the year thirteen thousand dollars in the red. Its growing appetite for funding meant that a disruption or a decrease in donations would leave the Conference unable to function. With its arms reaching out all across the South, the Conference could not afford to return to its days of idle frugality.[195]

The Southern Conference repaid the aid it received from labor with a staunch defense and promotion of unions in the South. The *Southern Patriot* became the primary tool for Dombrowski and Foreman to advocate the cause of labor. The paper lamented labor's setbacks, extolled labor's successes, and aired the dirty tactics used against labor by unscrupulous southern industrialists and their Wall Street backers, whom the Southern Conference labeled as fascist and corrupt special interests. The *Southern Patriot* equated the attack on labor's right to organize to the complete undermining of the democratic rights of the entire southern people. When an anti-labor newsletter, misleadingly nameds the *Militant Truth*, kept appearing at sites in the process of unionization, the *Southern Patriot* devoted an entire special issue to investigating and unmasking the employers and factories owners who were secretly funding the newsletter. In another special edition, following its expose of *Militant Truth*, the *Southern Patriot* educated the southern public on what unionism is about. It praised unions for fighting against discrimination and promoting toleration, for their democratic system, and for tackling the root of many southern problems, low wages.[196]

Outside of the pages of the *Southern Patriot*, the Southern Conference cooperated with the CIO's ground campaign through its state committees. Most of the major drives the state

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[195] Reed, Simple Decency, 36-38; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 107, 125; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 107, 137; Adams, Dombrowski, 134. There are two estimates of how much the Southern Conference collected in 1945. Douty estimated that more than $86,400 in revenue and Reed concurred with Douty's estimation, but Krueger, on the other hand, provided the precise figure of $82,583.

[196] "The Rights of Labor," SP 4, no.3 (March, 1946): 4; "The Truth About Militant Truth," SP 4, no.5 (May 1946): 3-5; "Your Stake in Labor's Organizing Drive," SP 4, no.6 (June 1946): 1-3.

committees undertook to increase the minimum wage, register and educate voters had labor unions or labor leaders by their side. In anticipation of the CIO's massive drive to unionize the South, known as "Operation Dixie," the executive committee of the Southern Conference, meeting in September 1945, adopted a five-point action plan for the following year where four of the five points were dedicated to the education of the public on full employment, the benefits of unemployment compensation, the need for a 65 cent minimum wage law, and a permanent FEPC.[197] But tying in to the success of labor in the South was the unanswered question of race. Henry Moon foresaw that the success or failure of the labor movement was limited to "the degree to which the working class can be liberated from the specious doctrine of white supremacy."[198] His experience with the SCHW had also taught Foreman that the "chief instrument of exploitation, and therefore the chief cause of poverty, is segregation."[199] Foreman believed, therefore, that labor could not ultimately make gains in the South unless it completely abolished segregation within its own ranks. The South could not move forward unless it did the same. The campaign to unionize to the South was thus paralleled by one to end segregation and raise the social status of African Americans.

The Southern Conference did not begin as a race oriented organization. White organizers of the Birmingham conference had promised the African-American delegates that the conference would represent a new and vigorous outlook on the economic, educational, and political problems plaguing southern blacks, but nothing was said about segregation. The issue of segregation was forced on the Southern Conference by "Bull" O'Connor and his demand for a segregated auditorium. The Conference's resolution never to meet in a segregated setting again was grossly misconstrued by both the black and white presses as a call for the end of segregation

[197]Adams, Dombrowski, 143.
[198] Moon, Balance of Power, 11.
[199] Foreman, "Decade," 149-50.

itself. But this misunderstanding ultimately liberalized the Southern Conference at the cost of alienating its more cautious members. Conservative elements within the SCHW quickly fled the organization while moderates slowly drifted away over a period of four years. The young SCHW, after its controversial resolution at Birmingham, did not openly challenge the race relationships in the South, even ignoring it at times. The early Southern Conference and the Civil Rights Committee tried hard to avoid turning repeal of the poll tax into a race issue in order to retain support of cautious liberals and moderates in the South and to prevent the southern conservatives from using race as a wedge issue.

During the first four years of its life, the Conference was still searching for its identity. At the same time, the contentious battle to abolish the poll tax was occupying the Conference's attention and taxing its meager resources. The Southern Conference was content for the time being not to hold a segregated meeting and the integrationist symbolism that it stood for. But it was difficult at times to live up to the simple spirit of its desegregated conference policy in the Jim Crow South. Although the official private and public meetings were completely desegregated, the Conference could not control the racial policies of the hotels and restaurants its members patronized once business was done. White and black members would have to stay at different hotels and dine separately. Virginia Durr and Mary Bethune took great pleasure in defying this southern convention and would dine and travel together whenever they could. The transformative power of World War II provided the Southern Conference with the impetus to make a stand against maltreatment of African Americans and the inherent injustice of Jim Crow.[200]

[200] Sosna, In Search, 90-92, 141; Foreman, interview, 55; Durr, interview, March 1975, 191; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 148-49.

The postwar world's outlook on race provided the Southern Conference with the opportunity to shed its early hesitation and to advance its own racial agenda. America's dilemmas, its racial problems, were no longer the exclusive province of the American press or the American people. After the horrors of the Holocaust, the developing world was scrutinizing Jim Crow with a critical eye. The Soviet Union took great delight in pointing out America's racial flaws to the developing nations who were beginning to throw off the shackles of European imperialism. Americans, especially younger ones, were not oblivious to these charges and what a potent symbol it would be if the United States did away with Jim Crow. A survey, done before the end of the war, discovered that 71 percent of college students believed that giving African Americans full civil rights would strengthen democracy in the world. World peace required amity between the races, and the idea of separation of the races was the antithesis to this vision of peace.[201]

Inside the Southern Conference, the feeling that the war had spelled the death of Jim Crow was amplified by the loud and insistent protest of its advanced white liberal members like the writer Lillian Smith. Smith challenged cautious liberals to abandon their own racial prejudices and accept the facts that economic security and political empowerment, under the guise of "separate but equal," would never be true equality. Smith lamented that cautious liberals had for too long hidden behind the illusion that if the South tried hard, it could give its black population equivalent services. They had failed to see that separation of the races, as a philosophy, adhered to the notion that there were fundamental differences between the races that could never be reconciled. Blacks, in the minds of whites, were perpetually inferior and no matter how far they got in life, they had to be kept separate should they otherwise taint the purity

[201] Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," Stanford Law Review 41, no. 1 (November 1988): 80-94; Levi, "Social Beliefs of College Students," 131.

of the white race. Equality, Smith argued, was not something that could be purchased with economic improvements or equal services, but a mental mindset that must be nurtured without barriers separating the races. Only total inclusiveness, with no segregation whatsoever, Smith contended, would represent true equality. Smith also warned that if southern liberals failed to act, if they continued with their evasion, quiet pressure, and blaming African Americans for inciting riots with their demands for equality, then the responsibilities for the violence that would come from the failure to act would be theirs. Adding to the weight that was pushing the Southern Conference leftward was the growing militant tone and number of black members. Regardless of where they fell on the political spectrum, black members were of one mind when it came to segregation: it had to go.[202]

African Americans, impressed by the SCHW's no segregated meeting stance, filled the emptying ranks that conservative and moderates had left open. When Dombrowski took over the Conference in 1942, only 500 members had paid their dues. But by the mid-1945 that number had reached 1,224 with another 1,525 dues-paying associates outside of the South. A large part of the expansion of the Conference's membership was due to a surge in African-American enrollment. The SCHW's 1942 biennial conference in Nashville saw one third of delegates being African-American. African Americans eventually made up half of the attending delegates at the 1946 conference at New Orleans. At the same conference, Walter White, the executive secretary

[202] Lillian Smith, "Southern Defensive II," Common Ground 4 (Spring 1944): 36-42; Lillian Smith "Addressed to White Liberals," New Republic, September 18, 1944, 331-33; Lillian Smith, "Are We Not All Confused?" South Today 7 (Spring 1942): 30-34; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 114-18; Egerton, Speak Now, 288. In a case demonstrating how unanimous African Americans was in their opposition to segregation, W.T. Couch, a liberal white editor of the University of North Carolina Press and a member of the Southern Conference, was stunned to learn that of the fifteen black intellectuals and activists (five liberals, five radicals, four conservatives, and one moderate) asked to submit articles on "What the Negro Wants," they were unanimous in their opposition to segregation. They differed only on the implementations. Couch, debating whether he should publish the articles, was threatened with a lawsuit by the book editor, Rayford Logan, a black academics. Couch published the book, but added in a caveat in the "Publisher's Introduction" that the sudden end of segregation "would be disastrous for everyone and more so for the Negro than the white man." See W.T. Couch, "Publisher's Introduction," in Rayford W. Logan, ed., What the Negro Wants (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), .xx and Tindall, New South, 14.

of the NAACP, and Mary McLeod Bethune, the director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration and a highly respected African-American leader, delivered two major galvanizing addresses calling for a new day for African Americans in America. The dramatic rise in black membership can be attributed to both the growing postwar demand of African Americans for social justice and their public activism, but also from active recruitment on the part of the Southern Conference and the leadership of Foreman. At its Nashville conference, the SCHW presented Frank Graham and Mary Bethune with the Thomas Jefferson Awards for their national service. The First Lady was there to present Bethune the award. The decision was made in part for big publicity to draw the attention of the black press and to increase the Southern Conference's visibility within the African-American community. Furthermore, Foreman's long record of working on behalf of the African-American community, at great cost to himself, reassured black members that the Southern Conference was serious in its commitment to civil rights, and Foreman did not disappoint. By the time of the Nashville Conference, the SCHW had virtually lost most of its conservative and moderate members. Without a counterbalance, the Southern Conference tilted heavily to the left. Starting in 1944, the Southern Conference began to shed its earlier hesitation and embrace an active role in promoting civil rights. Two short years later, at its New Orleans conference, the Southern Conference publicly condemned arbitrary segregation in every facet of American life and became one of the first prominent white-led organizations to come out openly against segregation.[203]

The Southern Conference's most famous involvement in protecting the civil rights of African Americans was in the Columbia Race Riot of 1946 in Tennessee. The riot was a

[203] Adams, Dombrowski, 39, 164, 170; Durr, Outside, 153; "Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt Presents Coveted Awards," CD, May 2, 1942; Reed, Simple Decency, 81, 86. Walter White and Mary McLeod had great trust in Foreman. When he was endangered of losing his post over the Sojourner Truth project, they vigorously lobbied to F.D.R. to do whatever was necessary to defend Foreman. See Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 63-64.

reflection of a larger postwar tension between African Americans, especially returning black veterans, who were no longer kowtowing to the racial mores, and outraged southern whites who demanded the maintenance of the traditional status quo. The incident began on February 25 with a dispute between James Stephenson, an African-American Navy veteran, his mother, and William Fleming, a white radio repair man and a veteran himself. Mrs. Stephenson's younger son had left a radio for repair at Fleming's shop, but due to a miscommunication, the radio was sold without the Stephensons' permission. When the Stephensons demanded their property back, Fleming retrieved the radio and ordered them out of his shop. The Stephensons, on their way out, made a disparaging remark about the shop to an incoming customer and Fleming retaliated with his fist. A scuffle broke out between the three near the street door, and Fleming either fell or was shoved through the window and fell on to the street. The fight continued briefly before a police officer ended the scuffle by arresting the Stephensons. The fight might have ended there had if not been for Fleming's large and extensive family and friends who lived along the rural areas surrounding Columbia. The news of the attack on Fleming quickly spread, and later in the afternoon groups of white men from rural sections descended on the Columbia courthouse with the thought of lynching the Stephensons. Fortunately, a local businessman had posted bail for the mother and son and helped them escape the approaching mob.[204]

Lynching and race violence were not unheard of in Columbia. The city had had two lynchings within the previous twenty years and one failed attempt the year before. The relative prosperity of blacks in Columbia had angered many poor whites from the surrounding farming areas. Exacerbating the tension was the fact that many black veterans returning from the war refused to work at their old, poorly paid jobs as farm laborers. Some of them sought work in

[204] Dorothy Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia, Tennessee, February 25-27, 1946," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 39 (1980): 60-61; Gail Williams O'Brien, The Color of the Law: Race, Violence, and Justice in the Post-World War II South (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina, 1999), 7-15.

Columbia and the veterans who could not find work received twenty dollars a week from their GI unemployment compensation. The severe shortage of laborers and the thought of unemployed blacks making more money than a poor white farmer angered many whites from the surrounding rural areas. The attack on Fleming became an excuse to strike back.[205]

After the mob failed to find their intended victims, its members lingered around the courthouse aimlessly with bottles of beer in one hand and a rifle in the other. African Americans, with the memory of the previous lynchings still fresh in their minds, prepared for the worst. A group of African Americans gathered at the black business district known as Mink Slide, which was next to the courthouse, to discuss the impending threat. Some brought guns with them and expressed their intention to protect their homes and businesses if the white mob crossed the line into Mink Slide. Their number was boosted by the arrival of those from the surrounding black community who had heard of the lynching attempt. The sheriff tried to persuade them to go home and wait out the night, but black business owners were fearful of leaving their businesses completely at the mercy to the lingering mob. Taking defensive action, store owners turned off all the lights and waited in their buildings. Unfortunately, later that evening the chief of police and three other patrolmen entered the pitch black Mink Slide and were fired upon. The firing triggered an immediate invasion of Mink Slide from the state patrolmen who had been summoned by the governor and who had surrounded the business district. It was unclear who fired the first shot between the invading patrolmen and the hidden business owners, but after it happened the patrolmen unleashed volleys of bullets indiscriminately into the buildings. Terrified and grossly outgunned, the trapped African Americans immediately surrendered to the state patrolmen. Over a hundred were arrested on the spot. But even after surrendering, they were

[205] "Columbia Boasts Long Tradition As Lynch Town," CD, March 9, 1946; Guy B. Johnson, "What Happened at Columbia," New South 1, no.5 (May 1946): 1-2.

beaten and clubbed by the patrolmen as they marched to jail and their weapons confiscated. After watching the spectacle, the unorganized whites, many of whom were drunk, descended on Mink Slide to loot and pillage without any resistance from the present state patrolmen. Almost every black business establishment was completely wrecked, its money stolen and furnishing and equipments destroyed or looted. The policemen, meanwhile, went door to door in the black residential district and confiscated firearms without warrants and arrested whomever they pleased. Adding to the disaster was the shooting of two black prisoners by the police officers two days later. One of the black prisoners was toying with a police weapon before he accidentally discharged it, hitting a deputy in the arm. Officers from the next room rushed in and fired immediately killing both of the prisoners. The shooting marked the end of violence relating to the riot, but the beginning of the Southern Conference's work.[206]

The Southern Conference, headquartered in Nashville after the 1942 conference, was only thirty eight miles away from Columbia. Dombrowski immediately sprang to action when word of the riot and looting got out. Within twenty-four hours of the incident, Dombrowski was able to get out a newsletter detailing the police assault of Mink Slide and the arrest of a hundred African Americans to all the people in the Southern Conference's contact list in the state. The Conference filed a protest with the prosecuting attorney calling for the release of all prisoners who were not being charged with a crime. When Walter White and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP arrived at Columbia to organize a defense team, Dombrowski immediately reached out to them about forming a national organization to defend the indicted African Americans. White, surprised that a white southern organization would extend its hand and publicly work with the NAACP, which was frequently vilified by the southern press as a dangerous radical fringe group,

[206] O'Brien, Color of the Law, 19-28; Johnson, "What Happened at Columbia," 3-5; "4 Police Shot; Call Tennessee Guardsmen Out," CD, February 26, 1946; "Disorders Halted in Tennessee City," NYT, February 27, 1946; Richard Durham, "Eyewitness Describes Riot Town," CD, March 9, 1946; Dombrowski, "The Southern Conference," 14-15.

accepted Dombrowski's offer of help. The Southern Conference's office in Nashville quickly became the informal headquarters for activities relating to the publicity of the Columbia Riot and the release of the unjustly imprisoned African Americans. The Conference's publication, in collaboration with the NAACP, of a pamphlet, "Truth about Columbia," detailing the story of Columbia with pictures of the victims ran to more than a hundred thousand copies. The Conference generated over twenty-thousand protest letters to Governor Jim McCord demanding justice for the black victims. The Conference organized an emergency conference with the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, and CIO to form the United Committee Against Police Terror in Columbia, Tennessee. The committee worked to raise aid for the victims, provide legal defense for those imprisoned, and to demand an investigation from Attorney General Tom Clark for civil rights violation. The NAACP, the Southern Conference, and the Communist Party successfully mobilized public opinion enough to pressure the Attorney General, Thom Clark, to investigate the incident. Fundraising for the victims was a success, bringing in a surplus of $9,000 for the NAACP after the legal fees and expenses. The Southern Conference's first public battle on behalf of African Americans would be a resounding victory.[207]

Many of the arrested African Americans were eventually released. 31blacks and four whites were indicted for the Columbia Riot. Of those numbers, twenty five black defendants were tried and, to the surprise of many, twenty three were acquitted. The two who were found guilty of assaulting police troopers with a gun were given twenty one years, but their sentences were reduced upon appeal. Success had its limit however. The federal grand jury charged with

[207] Adams, Dombrowski, 159-60; "Two Slain As Race Rioters Terrorize Tenn. Town," CD, March 9, 1946; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 151; Dombrowski, "The Southern Conference," 14, 16; "Columbia Lynch Terror Victims Get Aid," CD, March 23, 1946; Venice Spraggs, "Charge Justice Dept. Ducks Action On Columbia," CD, March 23, 1946; O'Brien, Color of the Law, 209, 181.

investigating any wrong doing of the Tennessean police force in its illegal search and seizure of weapons absolved the police force of any guilt. The grand jury even praised the governor of the Tennessee for his action in sending in the state troopers thus helping prevent a bloody race war. By November 1946, the bloody episode of the Columbia Riot was over. Black business owners were left to rebuild much of their destroyed properties with no compensation from the state.[208]

The role the Southern Conference in this event had earned it both respect and ire. Its vigorous defense of the arrested African Americans and fierce condemnation of the abusive police force reflected the Conference's permanent leftward shift in racial issues. Even as it was learning about the riot, the Conference was decisively on the side of the arrested African American. In its literature, the Conference placed most of the blame squarely on the aggression of the white mob and the police.[209] The Southern Conference's forceful defense of the people of Mink Slide earned it the displeasure of the Tennessean press and its politicians. When the Attorney General convened a federal grand jury to investigate police brutality, federal judge Elmer Davies charged the jury to "subpoena before you the officials of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and question them as to the facts contained in this pamphlet ["The Truth about Columbia"]." And if the facts on the pamphlet were not valid, Davis went on, "then the circulators of this pamphlet should be exposed for deliberately agitating matters of this kind to cause difficulties between races which are trying to live together in peace and harmony."[210] Dombrowski was called in to testify before the grand jury to determine if the Southern Conference had a roll in inciting the riot. The conservative *Nashville Banner*, never a friend of the Southern Conference, repeatedly brought up the charge of communism to discredit the efforts

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[208] "Indict 31 Negroes, 4 Whites In Columbia Riot" CD, March 30, 1946; "Free 23 Negroes in Riot Case in Tennessee," Chicago Daily Tribune, October 23, 1946; "23 Riot Victims Freed," CD, October 12, 1946; "No Violations of Civil Rights Found in Tennessee Race Riot" WP, June 15, 1946;
[209] SP 5, no.2 (March 1947): 7.
[210] O'Brien, Color of the Law, 36.

of the organization. Threatening phone calls were made daily to Dombrowski's home and office accusing him of being a traitor and a Red. The governor of Tennessee, suspecting Dombrowski was a Communist and the SCHW was just a Communist front, tapped the phone at the Conference's office. When on the campaign trail, Tennessean politicians took turns blasting the Conference as a Communist outfit and the cause of tension between the races in the state. Even the moderate Guy Johnson of the Southern Regional Council was critical of the Southern Conference for glamorizing the event to fit its agenda. African Americans, on the other hand, were very grateful for all the work the Conference had done to support for the black community in Columbia. To repay the Southern Conference for its work in Columbia, Walter White agreed to attend the Southern Conference's fourth biennial meeting in New Orleans in Thanksgiving 1946. Mary McLeod Bethune embarked on a wildly popular speaking tour all across the South on behalf of the Conference to raise desperately needed funds during early 1946. By the end of her tour, Bethune had raised nearly $10,000 and recruited six thousand new paid members. The Conference's close cooperation with the NAACP and its passionate defense of the black victims of the riot would help push the organization to take one giant step forward in its racial position at the New Orleans conference: its opposition to segregation in South.[211]

The Southern Conference's fourth biennial meeting was held in New Orleans from November 28 to 30 in 1946. Most of the 11-point program Southern Conference advertised for the meeting was not markedly different from those of eight years ago. It called for more funding for education, health care and modern housing for southern families, an end to discriminatory

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[211] "Jury Finishes Questioning of Dombrowski," Nashville Banner, June 4, 1946; "SCHW Branded Southern Front of Communism," NB, July 19, 1946; "Communist Daily Worker Comes to Southern Conference for Human Welfare—And Workers Seem to Follow 'Line,'" NB, August 1, 1946; O'Brien, Color of the Law, 177, 208; Julia Anne McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1993), 344-45; Johnson, "What Happened at Columbia," 6; SP, 4, no. 9 (September 1946): 1-3; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 151; Adams, Dombrowski,168.

freight rates to promote business, and the abolishment of the poll tax. But what was different was its call for the end of the "arbitrary restrictions…and discrimination based on race, creed, religion and nationality."[212] The New Orleans conference began on a gray and cheerless day. It looked as if the Conference's luck would reflect the weather when, despite booking the event months before and making known that this would be an integrated meeting, the Municipal Auditorium Commission made a last-minute decision to enforce Jim Crow on the gathering. The only excuse given was to preserve the custom of the city of New Orleans. The conference organizers, refusing to buckle to the arbitrariness of the decision, decided to hold the meeting at the smaller Carpenter Union's auditorium. Over 1200 people attended the meeting and many were turned away due to the lack of space. The Thomas Jefferson Award was given to the liberal governor of Georgia, Ellis Arnall. All of the major speakers extolled the need to do much more in the coming years: Senator Claude Pepper made a passionate plea for the "breaking of the stronghold of monopoly on the South" and to usher in a new age of race relations; Dombrowski both praised and challenged the Conference to promote a platform where African Americans could air their grievances and work out solutions; Foreman went further than all of them when he made it clear to all the attendees that the Southern Conference was unalterably opposed to racial segregation. The New Orleans conference ended with a feeling of "triumph and of promise in the air." Some of the magic of the Birmingham conference was recaptured at New Orleans. But the eight years between Birmingham and New Orleans had seen the maturity of Southern Conference. Its advanced racial position separated itself from the rest of the liberal South who were still timidly cautious over the thought of desegregation.[213]

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[212] "Call to Thanksgiving Conference Nov. 28-30," SP 4, no. 9 (September 1946): 1-3

[213] "Group Fails to Get New Orleans hall," NYT, November 28, 1946; J. L. LeFlore, "Southern Conference: Pepper, Arnall Attack Reaction," CD, December 7, 1946; "The Organized Army of Southern Progress," SP 4, no. 11 (December 1946): 2-3.

The Southern Conference used the *Southern Patriot* to press the case vigorously for equal rights for African Americans and the abolishment of racial segregation. In one of its postwar pamphlets, "Look Him in the Eye," the Conference challenged white Americans to look in the eyes of a black veteran and deny the sacrifices that he and his people had made to win the war. In another pamphlet, the Conference provided detailed information and statistical data on the high poverty and death rates southern blacks suffered. The *Southern Patriot* released a hundred thousand copies of its comic book, "There Are No Master Races," to educate children on the shared brotherhood between the races and to dispel the outdated and racist notion that blacks were genetically inferior to whites. After New Orleans, the Southern Conference began publicly attacking Jim Crow's most sacred cow: segregation. In a two-part special of the *Southern Patriot*, the Southern Conference laid out the disparity and inequality between white and black schools in the South. A white child received twice the resources that a black child received. Although black teachers' salaries had doubled since 1930, white teachers' salaries were still 40 percent higher by 1945. With the exception of a few law schools in four southern states, there was a complete lack of graduate schools in the South for black students in all major disciplines. The only logical answer to end racial disparity, the Conference argued, was to end the segregation of public educational institutions.[214] The Southern Conference concluded that segregation was "symbol of inferiority and served conveniently to remove some of the moral reproach of class exploitation," and added that segregation had "no rational bases today."[215] Even if physical parity could be achieved, Conference contended that true equality between white and black schools would never be reached. Degrees from different institutions could never be equal because their values depended on the community, alumni base, and tradition of the

[214] Dombrowski, "The Southern Conference," 23; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 149; SP 4, no. 7 (July 1946): 8; "Separate and Unequal," SP 5, no. 8 (October 1947).
[215] "The Case Against Segregated Schools," SP 5, No.8 (October 1947): 8.

particular universities. Regional graduate schools for black students, as proposed by many southern governors, were no real substitutes. They were simply segregationist tactics employed by politicians and not educators. The Southern Conference's advocacy against segregation expanded beyond education to include hospitals, public housing, and all public places. Societal segregation, the organization argued, was neither economically nor ethically sounds. The Conference contended that the South continued to mire in poverty because it had to support two systems of everything in order to maintain the segregation. Segregation, simply put, was the "central evil of the South."[216]

At the end of 1947, the Southern Conference audaciously declared that "there has never been a more favorable time for the opponents of segregation to take the offensive….all injustice and inequality and discrimination will continue until segregation is ended. The time to 'go slow' is past."[217] On November 20, 1948, ten years after the first meeting of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare was held and six years before the landmark *Brown* decision, a group of fifty individuals from twelve southern states assembled at the home of Thomas Jefferson to formally adopt the Declaration of Civil Rights. The Declaration emulated the hallowed words of the great Monticello sage when it called for the abolishment of all segregating barriers to the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration did not represent a radical shift in policy, but a formal and official acknowledgment of the Conference's advanced racial position since 1946. The Southern

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[216] "Southern Social Scientists Favor Ending Segregation in Graduate Schools," SP 6, no. 4 (May 1948): 1; quote from Aubrey Williams, "'States' Rights Is Cover-Up Talk'," SP 6, no. 6 (August 1948): 3.

[217] SP 6, no.2 (March 1948):7. In 1947, the administration and ownership of the *Southern Patriot* was transferred from the Southern Conference t to the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF). The SCEF was created by the Southern Conference to carry on the educational work of the Southern Conference while it engaged on political work. Both organizations shared the same board of directors and the same administrators with little distinction between them. So although the *Southern Patriot* was publishing under the banner of the SCEF, its message was still that of the Southern Conference.

Conference became the first white-led southern organizations to declare openly its opposition to segregation and one of its fiercest early critics and enemies.[218]

[218] "Southerners Adopt Declaration of Civil Rights; Call For End of Discrimination and Segregation," SP 6, no. 10 (December 1948): 1-4.

Chapter 4: The End of Progress

Shortly after the creation of the Southern Conference, William Gee of the University of Virginia, in a letter to Howard Odum, predicted that the "[SCHW] will stir up a great deal of enthusiasm and do some good work over a period of years [but] then, as is true of so many organizations of that nature, it will likely dwindle and pass off the stage."[219] In 1946, Gee's pessimistic prediction seemed like a failed prognostication. The Southern Conference ended the year with its highest revenue ever and its active members, which had peaked at 6,000, its highest number ever, had renewed its spirit of activism.[220] But it was a false dawn. New Orleans proved to be the last hurrah of the Southern Conference. The seed of its destruction lay in its pride in being an open organization that did not judge a member's belief and kept its door open to those with radical ideologies. To its enemies that openness was a fatal flaw that they were eager to characterize as collusion with Communists. The number of Communists in the Southern

[219] Tindall, New South, 637.
[220] Dombrowski, "The Southern Conference," 22.

Conference was insignificant and they had no power base within the Southern Conference to direct its mission. But this did not matter as the nation entered a cold war with the Soviet Union. The distrust and hysteria that characterized the period had a profoundly negative impact on the credibility of the Southern Conference. The CIO, which the SCHW had long allied itself with and depended on for more than a third of its revenue, grew concerned over relationships, real or imaginary, with Communist-tainted organizations. In an effort to brand itself as a patriotic and respectable organization in the increasingly reactionary South before the commencement of its "Operation Dixie," the CIO decided to cut all ties with the Southern Conference. The dramatic decrease of financial contributions from the unions sent the Conference into shock in 1947. The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, which was also heavily subsidized by the unions, lost almost its entire budget. It was reabsorbed back to the Southern Conference in late 1946 because it could no longer finance tself. While trying to cope with the near fatal blow delivered by the labor unions, the Conference suffered an internal civil war between Dombrowski and Foreman. Foreman, wanting to make the Conference prepared for political mobilization, did not think the cautious and deliberative Dombrowski had the political organizing skill to manage a mass political organization. The two, whose partnership had lifted the Conference to its highest point, were now dividing the Southern Conference into two bitter camps. The final blow came in 1948 with Henry Wallace's presidential campaign on the Progressive ticket. Wallace campaign was seen by many within the Conference, especially Clark Foreman and Virginia Durr, as the answer to the severely weakened advanced southern liberals. James Dombrowski and Aubrey Williams, however, saw Wallace as a critical threat to the reelection of Harry Truman, whose civil rights agenda represented the only realistic hope of reform. Unwilling to give up their long shot, Foreman and Durr left the dying Conference to work on the Wallace's quixotic campaign.

Dombrowski and Williams abandoned what was left of the organization and retreated to the Conference's offspring, the Southern Conference Education Fund, which was charged with educating the South. On November 21, 1948, one day after the ten year anniversary of its founding and its Declaration of Civil Rights, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare formally ceased to exist. The SCHW's path from the vanguard of southern liberalism to its grave at Monticello was paved with uncompromised idealism. The Southern Conference would find out that its unwavering commitment to the highest progressive ideal of equality and fraternity would be its greatest flaw. In a country where divisions were increasingly drawn between black and white, and between red-white-and-blue patriots and red subversives, the Southern Conference's hope for an open and just society was a dream too advanced for its time.

The charge that the Southern Conference was controlled by communists haunted the organization ever since its inaugural meeting at Birmingham in 1938. Over six hundred "dyed-in-the-wool Communists" had met in Birmingham, the antiunion and anti-New Deal *Alabama* squawked. The Alabama Woman's Democratic Club (AWDC), a front for the industrialists in Birmingham, accused the Conference's Birmingham meeting as a gathering of Communists and demanded the identity of those who financed, organized, and selected delegates for the conference. Adding fuel to the fire, Aubrey Williams, then acting administrator of the Work Progress Administration, injudiciously joked during the Birmingham conference that "Class warfare does a lot of good." The poor joke was picked up by the national press the next day and it was seen by SCHW's critics as definitive proof that the Southern Conference was Communist-

controlled. After Williams' comment, the House on Un-American Activities (HUAC) immediately signaled its intention to investigate the activity of the Southern Conference.[221]

In reality, however, out of the 1,200 delegates that showed up to the Birmingham conference, there were only six confirmed Communists. Nevertheless, it was six too many for those outside the Conference, and some inside. One of the prominent guests at the conference, Francis P. Miller, a Virginia lawyer and the founder of the Southern Policy Committee, who attended the meeting to investigate whether this SCHW would be a rival, began to have serious doubts when he saw the husband of someone who he thought was a Communist at the meeting. Writing to Congressman Brook Hays, an early endorser of the Conference, Miller expressed his fear that the Conference was controlled behind the scenes by some unknown element. Miller, who had been elected to one of the Conference's vice president positions, refused to serve. Similarly, Howard Kester, a radical preacher and the general secretary of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, was also convinced that the Birmingham meeting was orchestrated by either Communists or fellow-travelers. Kester identified John P. Davis of the National Negro Congress, Howard Lee, Joseph Gelders, and Myles Horton of the Highlander School as fellow-travelers. His evidence, however, was flimsy and based on unsubstantiated rumors.[222] He fingered Myles Horton as a Red despite not having "positive proof, [but] I am inclined to believe from all I hear that Highlander is strong [with the Communist Party]." [223] Some of the anti-Communist conferees maintained they would defend the rights of Communists to a limited degree, but they were not willing to work with them. Furthermore, these cautious individuals

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[221] Alabama, December 8, 1938; "Alabama Women Ask Inquiry on Parley," NYT, November 26, 1938; Williams' quote is from Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 101; "Class War and the New Dealers," CDT, November 24, 1938; "Williams of WPA Assailed by Dies," NYT, November 23, 1938; Durr, interview, March 1974, 88.

[222] Robert F. Hall, "Those Southern Liberals," Dissent, Fall 1979, 491; Francis Pickens Miller, Man from the Valley: Memoirs of a 20th- Century Virginian (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973):151-52; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 34-35;Dunbar, Against the Grain, 193.

[223] Dunbar, Against the Grain, 195.

worried that because of the insidious nature of Communists, those they spotted were only the tip of a larger red iceberg.

The accusation was serious enough to worry Frank Graham. Graham, who initially had no intention of assuming the presidency of the Conference, changed his mind. In a letter to Mark Ethridge, Graham revealed he was too busy to assume the responsibility and would have turned down the position had it not been for the Communist charge against the Southern Conference. He accepted the position in order to defend the Conference against attacks from its conservative critics. Graham felt that the creation of the SCHW was a unique moment in southern history, the first time southern liberals met openly to discuss the fate of the South. Graham did not want to movement to die before it got the chance to grow. He wanted to confront each of the accused to inform them of the charges and to ask them to explain themselves.[224]

One's name and credibility were everything in the South. Once tainted with disrepute, then one was nothing in southern society. Frank Graham saw three serious threats to the Southern Conference's social standing: first, the conservative business leaders who publicly denounced the Southern Conference as Communist front; second, the cautious liberals who had withdrawn their support for political reasons, but could still red-bait the Conference; third, the Communists themselves who operated in the shadows. Although these three threats could be mitigated by expelling all Communists, Graham had no intention of starting a witch hunt nor did he want to judge members for their beliefs. When Clark Foreman approached Graham with a proposal bar Communists from serving as officers, Graham rejected the idea. He believed that in order for the Southern Conference to be a just and liberal force in the South, it must to keep the moral high ground and be an example of openness and tolerance. Graham was fully committed to

[224] Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 44; the letter from Graham to Ethridge was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 43-45; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 82.

the democratic ideals and he did not believe that excluding Communists because of their beliefs was justifiable in a democratic society. Graham would tolerate Communists, but he wanted all members to be open about their political affiliation. He was confident that under an open democratic meeting, he and the other progressive members could easily defeat any insidious attempt by the Communists.[225] Furthermore, Graham was convinced that "the reason the Conference is criticized is not because it is one percent Red, but that it was fifty per cent Black."[226] Most of the earliest and harshest criticism came from the conservative press, politicians, and industrialists who used the charge of miscegenation interchangeably with communism. Giving in to them, Graham felt, would undermine the Southern Conference's effectiveness and credibility among liberals.

Not all shared Graham's egalitarian principles. The Communist charge against the SCHW caused great concern among many cautious liberals who did not want to be associated with communism. In a letter to Howard Lee, Barry Bingham expressed his worry, "If we are to be effective at all we must touch the minds of many other Southerners who do not class themselves as liberals, conservatives, or anything else." The red-baiting by reactionaries and cautious liberals threatened to undermine the Conference's public standing and curtail its effort to expand beyond its liberal base.[227] As reports from "reliable sources" mounted on the Communist infiltration, Graham asked H.C. Nixon to discover which members were

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[225] Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 158-62; Foreman, interview, 45. In its early years the Southern Conference relied on the credentials of its famous patrons to ward off criticism from the right and keep the moderates from fleeing. Barry Bingham stayed on with the Conference only because Frank Porter Graham remained there. Before the Chattanooga Conference began in 1940, Howard Lee worked with Julian Harris, editor of the Chattanooga Times and The Free Press, to neutralize potential negative press from reactionaries like the Alabama Woman's Democratic Club. Lee pressed the unimpeachable names of members like Frank Graham and Mrs. Roosevelt as evidence that the Conference was a respectable organization. When it looked like that Mrs. Roosevelt might not be able to make it due to schedule conflict, Barry Bingham, in a letter to the First Lady, implored her to make the meeting because without her presence, the Southern Conference at Chattanooga would not have sufficient credibility to ward off the attack of conservative zealots. See Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 45-47, 57-58, and Barry Bingham's letter to Mrs. Roosevelt was reproduced on page 58-60.

[226] Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 168.

[227] Bingham's quote is in Reed, Simple Decency, 23; Durr, interview, March 1975, 84-95; Durr, Outside, 123.

Communists. Graham did not want to expel them, but simply wanted them to come out in the open. The names of Howard Lee, who had been appointed executive secretary, Joseph Gelders, who were then the secretary of the Committee for Civil Rights, John B. Thompson, John P. Davis, Rob Hall, and Donald Burke came up with great frequency. The last two readily admitted their membership in the Communist Party. The first four, however, denied the allegation. It was shocking news, nevertheless, because three of the four were or would soon be leaders of the Southern Conference.[228]

Joseph Gelders, Howard Lee, and John P. Thompson became the three highest officers charged with being Communists. Gelders' politics had always been radically leftist. Rumors of him being a Communist traced back to his involvement with the National Defense of Political Prisoners. When he began to assemble supporters for the first conference at Birmingham, little was made of his radical politics. Many like Virginia Durr either did not believe he was a Communist, did not care, or had worked with him and trusted him. But Gelders did quietly join the Communist Party in 1936 before his brutal beating took place. Graham confronted Gelders in a letter in early 1940 asking Gelders bluntly whether he was involved with the Communist Party as a member or a fellow-traveler. Graham assured Gelders that he did not care about Gelders' political allegiance, but he must know in order to answer the mounting inquiries made against Gelders. Graham never recalled receiving a reply from Gelders. Howard Lee's affiliation in the Communist Party was a more disappointing revelation. Rumors of him being too closely associated with the Communist Party had circulated before he was chosen for the executive secretary position. His political position was heavily scrutinized and Lucy Mason had interviewed him to get a sense of his political compass. Lee told everyone that he was a socialist, but not a Communist. Mason thought Lee was not too close to the Communist Party and might

[228]Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 163; Egerton, Speak Now, 295.

be an effective secretary. She convinced other board members to take the risk. John P. Thompson, who was the last choice to replace Graham, did not make known his affiliation with the controversial American Peace Mobilization (APM) until after he was given the chairmanship. Although there was no evidence indicating Thompson was a Communist, his tie with the APM proved to be an embarrassment. It seemingly vindicated the accusations made by the red-baiters in the Conference.[229]

By 1940, many within the SCHW were apprehensive about Gelders' leadership of the Civil Rights Committee. The executive committee diminished Gelders' involvement in the poll tax issue and limited his role in the Conference. When World War II began, Gelders left the Conference for good to join the Army. Lee lost his position after the controversy involving his and Thompson's endorsement of the American Peace Mobilization under the Conference's letterhead. Thompson lost all power after the controversy and resigned his position a year after Lee. But the Conference's Communist problem was not over. The temporary replacement for Lee, Alton Lawrence, who was on loan from the CIO, turned out to be another Communist suspect. Lawrence was Graham's protégé at the University of North Carolina and was once bailed out of jail by Graham after being arrested in a textile strike. He had assured Graham that he was not a Communist, but this turned out to be another lie. Alton Lawrence soon left when Dombrowski was hired to be the permanent executive secretary.[230]

The fear of a Communist dominated Conference was grossly exaggerated. It was fueled by fanatics who were determined to cleanse the Conference. Gelders, Lee, and Lawrence had never sought to supplant the United States government. They became Communists because they were radicals who saw the promise of social justice and economic fairness in the Communist

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[229] Egerton, Speak Now, 178, 184, 299; McWhorter, Carry Me Home, 42; Graham letter to Dombrowski was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 23-25; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 155, 158.
[230]Reed, Simple Decency, 68; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 77; Foreman, interview, 46.

Party. They felt alienated from the broken system that fostered economic oppression and racism and had brought about the Great Depression. For all their deceptions and half-truth, Gelders, Lee, and Lawrence did not try to convert the Southern Conference into a branch of the Communist Party or steer the organization's policy toward those of Moscow. The single attempt by the few Communists in the Southern Conference to influence a public resolution at the Chattanooga conference would end in complete failure.[231]

With much of Europe engaging in World War II, the Chattanooga conference in 1940 could not escape the political climate of the day. The main theme of the meeting was "Democracy in the South," but it was quickly sidetracked once W.T. Couch, the director of the University of North Carolina Press, introduced a resolution condemning the Soviet Union invasion of Finland during the opening session. Couch thought that since the Conference had condemned the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, it should make a similar stand against the Soviet Union. The resolution opened the sour topic of international affairs. Although united on domestic policy, the Conference was evenly divided between isolationists and interventionists. The few Communists present, including Gelders, absolutely opposed Couch's resolution, claiming that the resolution had nothing to do the conference's domestic agenda. Aiding them were John L. Lewis and his labor unions, southern isolationists like John Thompson, and those like Clark Foreman who thought the Conference should focus its attention on the South. In the interventionist camp were Frank Graham, Virginia Durr, Mark Ethridge and Barry Bingham. Lewis considered the Allies' overture to America a plot by the British imperialists and Wall

[231] Durr, interview, October 1975, 129, 62-63; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 80; Foreman, interview, 47. Kenneth Douty's report on the Southern Conference, which specifically investigated the Communist charge, uncovered no trace of any direct or indirect influence from the Communist Party on the action or policy of the Southern Conference. The historians of the Southern Conference, Thomas Krueger and Linda Reed, agreed that the organization was never a Communist front. Gelders, Lee, and Lawrence did not try to turn it into one. See Krueger, Promises to Keep, 167-91 and Reed, Simple Decency, 45-64.

Street capitalists to draw America into another needless European conflict. Lewis fiercely opposed F.D.R.'s favorable foreign policy toward the Allies and went so far as to endorse the Republican Wendell Willkie for the presidency in 1940. Foreman, in a letter to Graham before the Chattanooga conference, expressed his amazement when he learned from Virginia Durr of Couch's intention. Foreman strongly felt that the Southern Conference should stick to its original mission of bettering the South. He threatened to vote down any such resolution, even if he had to join with the Communists to do so. Foreman feared, however, that the defeat of Couch's resolution would confirm the charge of communism in the eyes of the SCHW's critics. Nevertheless, Foreman threatened he would quit the Southern Conference if such a resolution passed. The South, in Foreman's mind, had to come first.[232]

After Couch introduced his resolution, and not too subtly mocked the Communists for being against Fascists before they were for them after the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1939, he was met with a violent reaction from some of the Communist delegates. Couch was knocked away from the microphone when he attempted to speak again. The proposal almost tore the conference apart. The Communists craftily maneuvered to prevent it from going to a vote by exploiting the pacifist and isolationist sentiments. They tried to divide the Conference into factions and control the debate through divisions. And there were enough divisions within the Conference for the Communists to exploit. The CIO, the mine workers union, and the socialists were willing to deplore Russian aggression, but would not budge on aiding the Allies. Virginia Durr and other interventionists wanted to pass a strong resolution supporting the Allies, but did not want to condemn Russia because they felt that Russia was only buying time before its inevitable war with the Nazi. John L. Lewis and his daughter Kathryn Lewis tried to overpower

[232] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 61-63; Robert H. Zieger, The CIO, 103, 108; Foreman's letter to Graham was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 64-66;

the Couch resolution and pass their own isolationist resolution against the Allies. They tried to use the large numbers of miners they brought to the Chattanooga conference as delegates to push their resolution through. Graham, Ethridge, Durr, and Bingham skillfully used parliamentary tactics to delay the vote. Most of the miners eventually got bored and left the Conference to wander around Chattanooga.[233]

Frank Graham took back control of the meeting and steered the Couch resolution to the Resolutions Committee for a compromise. In the middle of the night, Graham received a call from William Mitch of the Resolutions Committee who said that some members of the Committee were demanding that all the adjectives be removed from the final resolution. Graham quickly guessed that their goal was to remove the adjective "Communist." The Communists' attempt failed. The new resolution simply stated that the Southern Conference oppose the oppression of civil liberties, aggression against minorities and weak nations by all Fascist, Nazi, Communist, and imperialist powers. Satisfied with the carefully worded resolution, the non-Communist liberals caucused to shut down debate and got the resolution to a vote. It passed by an overwhelming margin. The final vote demonstrated that the Communists never had the numbers to influence the policy of the Southern Conference. Even the attempt to name a Communist member to the executive committee as a youth representative over Graham's candidate failed. The battle of Chattanooga was more between John Lewis and the interventionist camp, with the Communists benefitting from the division. The overwhelming support for the new resolution did not heal the bitter division and hurt feelings at Chattanooga. Graham, who

[233] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 69, 74-77; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 156; Durr, interview, March 1975, 145-67

initially wanted to use the conference to pick out his successor, had to delay his resignation for a few months.[234]

The most persistent red-baiters in the Southern Conference were the socialists led by Frank McCallister of the Southern Workers Defense League. The socialists' number in the Conference was never more than 300, but they were the loudest in questioning the political integrity of the organization's staff and board members. McCallister began to suspect Communist infiltration when the executive board passed over him to select John P. Davis, Paul Christopher of the Labor Defense League, and John Thompson as board members. Feeling snubbed, McCallister took it upon himself to purge the Conference of all Communists. He actively recruited members to his inquisition. Those who turned down his overture were treated by him as Communist sympathizers. "If you didn't go along with them, then they'd red-bait you," Durr recounted her experience of McCallister, "McCallister red-baited me to a fare-thee-well from then on out [after I refused his offer]."[235] McCallister reportedly accused Frank Graham and Mary Bethune as being "communist stooges" when they did not want to be a part of his witch hunt. In a letter to Frank Graham, McCallister proposed a resolution adopted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to ban Communists, fascists, and other totalitarians from serving on the staff or boards of the Conference. Graham promised to let the executive committee examine the proposal, but it never took place, partially because of the Chattanooga controversy. Undeterred, McCallister tried again at the Nashville Conference two years later.[236]

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[234] Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 167; Durr, Outside, 132-33; Durr, interview, October 1975, 75; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 142. The full resolution reads, "We deplore the rise of dictators anywhere, the suppression of civil liberties, the persecution of minorities, aggression against small and weak nations, the violation of the neutral rights and the democratic liberties of the peoples by all fascist, Nazi, communist and imperialist powers alike which resort to force and aggression instead of to the processes of law, freedom, democracy and international cooperation." The resolution is quoted from Walter Gellhorn, "Report on a Report of the House Committee on Un-American Activities," Harvard Law Review 60, no.8 (October 1947): 1227.

[235] Durr, Outside, 123.

[236] Reed, Simple Decency, 59; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 12, 106, 61-62.

The gathering at Nashville was supposed to be about rallying the South in support of the war, but it was once again split between different factions. The Communists urged the Conference to appeal to the President to open a second front in Europe. Foreman rebuked the attempt, pointing out that it was not the Conference's place to choose military strategy for the President. Despite the United States being an ally to the Soviet Union, McCallister attacked the Communists and introduced a resolution barring Communists from the organization. Foreman and Dombrowski opposed the McCallister resolution. They urged other conferees to defend freedom of expression. Without any real support from the rest of the organization, McCallister lost his chance again.[237] But in a small act of appeasement, the conferees adopted a new bylaw declaring that SCHW was open to all except any individual "who either advocates the overthrow of the government of the United States by force of violence or who is a member of an organization which advocates the overthrow of the government of the United States."[238] The resolution was mostly a patriotic gesture for the press. There was never an expulsion resulted from the resolution.

In spite of the modest resolution, the Conference faced an even more vigorous witch-hunt from McCallister. On the final day of the Nashville conference, the members were treated to a performance by the famous black bass Paul Robeson. After his performance to a sell-out audience, Robeson unexpectedly began to advocate for the release of Earl Browder, the secretary of the American Communist Party, who had been imprisoned for passport violation. The plea by Robeson breathed new life into McCallister's anti-Communist crusade. McCallister was determined to root out Communists. "When these red-baiters get out to mow you down and destroy you," Durr reflected with amusement, "a lot of them may be dumb, but they really make

[237] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 143; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 153-54; Foreman, interview, 44-45, 51-52; Egerton, Speak Now, 300.
[238] Reed, Simple Decency, 33.

a concerted effort."[239] McCallister eventually found a receptive ear in Roger Baldwin of the ACLU. Baldwin, a trustee of the Robert Marshall Fund, had helped secure a thousand dollars donation for the Nashville conference. Baldwin had promised more financial aid to the Conference before McCallister's accusation gave him second thoughts. In a letter to Clark Foreman on May 19, 1942, Baldwin wrote that the trustees of the Marshall Fund did not want to contribute money to any organization under Communist or Fascist control and they had "noted that certain secretaries of the Conference in the past had been either members of the Communist Party or fellow-travelers…." Baldwin brought up Thompson's association with the APM and Paul Robeson' speech at Nashville as further evidence of guilt. Baldwin warned the executive committee that they "do not appreciate the risks they run in collaboration closely with [Communists]…and prefer to shut their eyes to those risks rather than make an issue of excluding political intruders."[240] The attack against Thompson and Robeson did not elicit much of a response, however, McCallister and Baldwin had to find other targets.

McCallister and Baldwin found their new targets in John P. Davis and James Dombrowski. John P. Davis was the most controversial figure accused by Baldwin of being a Communist. Davis's National Negro Congress, after all, was founded through the Communist Party and he was responsible for Robeson's concert. Fearing that Baldwin's accusation might do serious harm to the Conference's reputation among northern foundations, Davis offered his resignation. He was convinced by William Mitch to withdraw his resignation and wait until the accusation was investigated. Dombrowski who had joined the Conference a year ago had initially earned the trust of Roger Baldwin. One of the conditions Baldwin placed on the original thousand dollar grant was that James Dombrowski be kept as executive secretary. Dombrowski

[239] Durr, Outside, 155.
[240] The full letter of Baldwin to Foreman was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 107-09.

fell from Baldwin's grace when he defended members against Baldwin's baseless Communist charge. Baldwin saw this as a betrayal and suspected Dombrowski was a fellow-traveler or a Communist.[241]

Unlike Lee and Thompson before them, Davis and Dombrowski were not responsible for the charge placed against them. Furthermore, many members of the executive committee rallied behind Davis and Dombrowski. Foreman, who did not care for Davis's politics, saw him as a valuable ally who shared similar view on economic reforms. Furthermore, Davis had never tried to steer the Conference's policy in anyway except toward the improvement of the South. Lucy Mason railed against Baldwin for his hypocritical stance of claiming to defend civil liberties on one hand while using the other to take them away. Mason reminded Baldwin that he and the ACLU were widely branded as Communists in the South. When Baldwin tried to convince Mrs. Roosevelt to take his side, Mason immediately fired a letter to Mrs. Roosevelt, defending the Southern Conference against Baldwin and McCallister's baseless assault. She refuted their claim that the entire organization was compromised of Communists because they suspected the leadership to be Communist. The McCallister-Baldwin attack finally diminished when one of the Marshal Trust Fund trustees, Gardner Jackson, came out supporting the Southern Conference. Although Jackson had serious reservations about Davis and his politics, he questioned Baldwin's tactic of burning a forest to kill a tree. Jackson was convinced that the Conference was overwhelmingly controlled by non-Communist members and was carrying out legitimate work. By September of 1942, Jackson had managed to convince Baldwin to stop red-baiting the

[241] Reed, Simple Decency, 58-61; Foreman, interview, 48-49; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 122.

SCHW, arguing that it was an enterprise that would bear little fruit and breed hostility between the two organizations.[242]

The internal and external red-baiting took a toll on the Southern Conference. Many prominent members left the organization, fearing their reputation would suffer because of the Conference's Communist-taint. When John P. Thompson did not step down from his chairmanship of the APM, the Conference's two prominent journalists and publishers, Mark Ethridge and Barry Bingham, resigned their positions. Dombrowski suspected that Homer P. Rainey, president of the University Texas and the newly elected president of the SCHW, resigned because of the McCallister-Baldwin accusation. Despite having the Nashville conference to rally the base, 1942 saw the Conference's membership plunged to 500, its lowest number up until then. The worst loss of all was the patron saint of the Southern Conference, Eleanor Roosevelt.[243]

Despite the intense criticism from both inside and outside critics, Mrs. Roosevelt had always stood by the Southern Conference. But the McCallister-Baldwin attack had shaken her faith in the organization. The First Lady's experience with the American Youth Congress two years earlier changed her attitude about Communist-tainted organizations. The American Youth Congress (AYC) was founded in 1934 by Violet Ilma to be a coordinating agency for youth organization. Since its creation, the AYC was dominated by the Communist Party. Eleanor. Roosevelt, however, supported the mission of the AYC and actively defended its reputation against conservative Democrats and Republicans alike. Her devotion to the AYC stemmed from her concern about the path the nation's youth was on. Dissatisfied with what the country had to offer them, American youth were often bitter and disillusioned. Mrs. Roosevelt worked closely

[242] Reed, Simple Decency, 61-64; Mason letter to Mrs. Roosevelt was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 109-10; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 159-60; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 91.
[243] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 94-96.

with the AYC leadership and even allowed them to name one of their fellowships after her. Despite her advisors cautioning her against the Communists in the organization, Mrs. Roosevelt believed that since the AYC was comprised of many other agencies and organizations, the Communists could not dominate the organization. After F.D.R. authorized loans to help the Finnish government to resist Soviet aggression, the AYC protested before the White House condemning the loan and praising the USSR. At the behest of the First Lady, the President spoke to the AYC in February 1940. Instead of giving a speech that tried to find common ground, the President delivered a harsh chiding to the group. F.D.R. gave them a "word of warning" not to expect "Utopia overnight," and called their reasoning on the situation in Finland "unadulterated twaddle" and "90 percent ignorance." The group, initially stunned by the tongue lashing, began to boo and hiss the President. Mrs. Roosevelt was dismayed and felt betrayed by their disrespectful reaction. Her originally warm relationship with the group cooled dramatically. The First Lady began to understand that the numerous charges against of AYC had validity after all.[244]

The AYC experience eroded much of Eleanor Roosevelt's faith in Communist-tainted organizations. McCallister and Baldwin's Communist charge against Dombrowski had stuck with the First Lady. She wrote to Foreman in 1942 and again in 1945 asking him if it was not wise to gradually eliminate the Communists within the Southern Conference, especially James Dombrowski. The First Lady initially had doubts about Dombrowski, but trusted Foreman's judgment of Dombrowski to be a socialist and not a Communist. But Dombrowski's willingness to work openly with Communists without ever questioning their intention raised serious doubts in Mrs. Roosevelt's mind. By 1945, Mrs. Roosevelt was convinced that Dombrowski was either

[244] Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 197, 206; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 165-66; "Youth Group Asks No Loans to Finns," NYT, February 4, 1940; "Text of Roosevelt Address To American Youth Congress," WP, February 11, 1940; Frank Adams , "Youth Told to Stand," NYT, February 11, 1940.

a fellow-traveler or a covert Communist. At the risk of losing Mrs. Roosevelt's support, Foreman defended Dombrowski and refused to expel him from the SCHW on the flimsy charge of McCallister and Baldwin. He implored the First Lady to ignore the silly charges by those who saw Communists where there were none. Dombrowski, too, wrote a long letter asking Mrs. Roosevelt to return to the Conference and vigorously defended himself and Foreman against all the fictitious charges of communism, but it was to no avail. Mrs. Roosevelt did not make a public break with the Conference, but she gradually drifted away from the organization. She did not attend the 1946 New Orleans conference and refused to help the organization secure a desperately needed $25,000 grant from the Rosenwald Fund, even at the request of Frank Graham. The Southern Conference thus maintained their ideal of an open organization at the extremely high cost of losing their patron saint, Mrs. Roosevelt.[245]

In spite of the urging of Mrs. Roosevelt, the Southern Conference did not systematically purge any suspected Communist. Those who were suspected of being a Communist either left of their own accord or stayed with the Conference until the end. Foreman and Dombrowski believed that it was more destructive to judge people arbitrarily on their affiliation rather than their actions. The Southern Conference was founded on the ethos of openness. It was a rare organization that put its goals of bettering the South and her people above doing what was politically expedient. "I believe in the Bill of Rights and am devoted to it for everybody." Foreman declared, "The Bill of Rights is there as the basis of American democracy and it's for everybody. Communists and socialists, black and white, everybody. And as soon as you start drawing lines and saying everybody but….Everybody except. Then the whole thing is

[245] Mrs. Roosevelt 1942 letter to Foreman was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 110-11 and the 1945 letter on page 120-21.

destroyed."[246] But as the country slipped into a long Cold War with the Soviet Union, the idea of openness to all regardless of creed became increasingly dangerous. The postwar years brought prosperity, but it also heightened racial tension and violence, paranoia toward Communist infiltration, and the increasingly dangerous threat of nuclear Armageddon. Communism became everything that was not American. The charge of communism, although internally contained, had permanently tainted the Conference's reputation in the South. Under this atmosphere of fear and suspicion, the Conference would lose its greatest supporters, the labor unions, to the postwar anti-Communist hysteria.

The postwar United States was a different world than the one the Southern Conference had hoped for. World War II had brought unprecedented prosperity and industry to the South, but it did not provide a solution to the region's complicated race relationships. The Southern Conference erroneously thought that the ephemeral spirit of progressivism experienced after the war was the long awaited awakening of the "Silent South." Unfortunately, race relationships in the South grew more contentious and violence. For all their pride of being experts on blacks, southern whites were woefully unprepared to meet their neighbor's growing expectations. Instead of adapting and compromising, southern whites retreated back to their dying traditions for answer: the use of force to suppress dissent. The event of Columbia Race Riot in 1946 was a sign of the boiling tension that was reaching a critical level. 1946 saw the infamous lynching of two black couples who were killed because one of the husbands had struck his white employer. In another incident during the same summer, Isaac Woodward, a recently released black veteran, was blinded by the chief of police of Aiken, South Carolina after he was kicked out of a bus for "creating disturbances." The chief of police was acquitted of all wrong doing and the bus company easily won a civil lawsuit filed by Woodward against it. The barbaric killing and

[246] Foreman, interview, 54.

beating spawned protests from outraged African Americans. Truman, shocked by the killings, decided to go ahead with the decision to set up a President's Committee on Civil Rights to investigate race violence and discrimination. The Southern Conference's ability to tackle these enormous challenges was severely compromised by a far more powerful wave of anti-communism than what it had experienced before. The Conference, unable to shake off its reputation as a Communist front, would become a liability for organizations that were trying to avoid being red-baited.[247]

As the United States and Soviet Union entered into the Cold War, the charge of communism became a popular tool by conservatives to undermine liberal forces around the country. Nowhere else was this method employed more frequently than in the South. Communists, never popular in the U.S. to begin with, now became synonymous with deception, subversive action, and treason. Anti-Communist sentiments were common everywhere in the country, but only in the South did they merge with anti-liberalism, anti-civil rights, anti-labor, and anti-integration. "Integration," one of the red-baiters put it bluntly, "is the Southern version of communism." The southern ruling elite and the conservative press used the charge of communism to discredit civil rights organizations, labor unions, and even the federal government, if they tried to challenge the South's social customs. Industrialists and conservative Democrats vigorously promoted the idea that communism was the guiding force behind blacks'

[247] Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 475-82; Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," Journal of American History 58, no. 3 (December 1971): 661-681; "Georgia Mob of 20 Men Massacres 2 Negroes, Wives; One Was Ex-GI," NYT, July 27, 1946; "Negro Made Blind at Batesburg, S.C.," NYT, August 18, 1946; "Police Chief Freed in Negro Beating," NYT, November 6, 1946; "Blinded Negro Loses Suit Against Bus Line for Ejection," WP, November 14, 1947; Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten, Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973), 45-48; Sitkoff, "Truman and the Election of 1948," 599.

determination to obtain equality.[248] "I deplore the fact that throughout the South today," Martin Dies of the House on Un-American Activities proclaimed indignantly, "subversive elements are attempting to convince the negro that he should be placed on social equality with white people, that now is the time for him to assert his rights."[249] Despite supporting Truman in his containment policy against the Soviet Union, conservative Democrats contradictory accused the federal government of authoritarian communism when Truman tried to get his civil rights bill passed. Conservative Democrats rebuked the civil rights bill as an attempt by Communists who had infiltrated the federal government to destroy the South. Strom Thurmond, then governor of South Carolina and the leader of the Dixiecrats, adopted the words of Mark Ethridge when he defiantly declared that "There are not enough troops in the army to force the South to give up segregation and admit the Negro race into our schools, our theatres, our swimming pools and our homes."[250] At a southern governor conference in March 1948, Thurmond, along with six other southern governors, pledged to oppose Truman's reelection and urged their constituents to oppose any candidate for office who were against lynching, poll tax, employment discrimination, and racial segregation. The fear of the rapidly changing status of African Americans and the high price of speaking up deterred many moderates and educated whites from challenging the position of the conservatives. Fear of communism had enveloped the white South. It forced southern whites to retreat back to their baser tradition.[251]

As one of the most visible and largest southern interracial organizations, the Southern Conference was forced to feel the conservative Democrats' wrath. Conservative politicians were

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[248] Wayne Addison Clark, "An Analysis of the Relationship Between Anti-Communism and Segregationist Thought in the Deep South, 1948-1964," (PhD diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976), 16-43; the red-baiter is quoted from Egerton, Speak Now, 301.
[249] Walter Goodman, The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), 484.
[250] "Distinguished Southerners Present Two Sides of Civil Rights," SP 6, no. 5 (June 1948): 1.
[251] John D. Morris, "7 of 15 Governors Repudiate Truman," NYT, March 14, 1948.

familiar with the Southern Conference from their advocacy of the anti-poll-tax bill and the organization's flaunting opposition to Jim Crow. In a late 1945 letter to Dombrowski, Senator Theodore Bilbo called the Southern Conference an "Un-American, negro social equality, communistic, mongrel outfit." The senator from Mississippi continued his rant wishing that "there was some filibuster that I could inaugurate that would immediately and finally and forever dissolve the so-called Southern Conference for Human Welfare...."[252] The National Committee for the Abolishment of Poll Tax was constantly monitored by the FBI. Virginia Durr recounted times when many young men from the "post office" would show up on their days off, wanting to volunteer for the NCAPT. Their identity as FBI agents quickly became apparent when the post office denied having any of them on its staff and the volunteers adamantly insisted on copying the mailing lists of donors. Durr, nevertheless, welcomed their help and made good use of their offered labor. Virginia Durr was not afraid of what the FBI could find because she believed she and the NCAPT had nothing to hide. Some state committees faced similar if not more dangerous harassments and scrutiny. Volunteers of the state committees were often scared off by local reactionaries who made it their mission to disrupt the committees' business.[253]

The most serious frontal attack against the Conference came from the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in June 1947. After learning that the Southern Conference was planning to launch the former Vice President Henry Wallace on speaking tour, it hastily put together a report titled "Report on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare." The HUAC report was a fantastical exercise of connecting the dots, no matter how remote and unlikely those dots were. And if no connection could reasonably be found, then HUAC would manufacture its

[252] Bilbo's letter to Dombrowski was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 141-42.
[253] Durr, March interview, 139-40.

own connection. The HUAC's tactic was simply a series of guilt-by-association.[254] Walter Gellhorn, in a piercing analysis of the committee's report, identified its method of accusation:

> This device involves, first, seeking to establish a tie, however tenuous, between an unpopular individual or organization and some person connected with the Southern Conference; second, ascribing to that person all the undesirable qualities of the individual or organization with whom he has been momentarily linked; and finally, attributing to the Southern Conference the qualities which have been acquired by infection, as it were, by these intermediate persons. Of course, the process is an endless one, for any individual who becomes associated with the Southern Conference will in turn acquire that organization's derivative taint and will transmit it to all other organizations he may later support.[255]

At the beginning of its report, the committee lost no time in accusing the Southern Conference of being the "most deviously camouflaged Communist-front organization."[256] The report first claimed that the origin of the Southern Conference was mysterious and yet it was absolutely convinced that the organization was spearheaded by Communists who were using the honest liberals as "convenient guinea pigs." The report's evidence purporting Communist manipulation of the SCHW was ludicrously outrageous. In one example, the report accused twenty-two members of being Communists because there was no record of them objecting to the activities of five known Communists during the Birmingham conference and because they supported a resolution demanding the release of the Scottsboro boys, a resolution that was universally popular among liberals. In another tortuous instance, the report pointed to an anonymous "conference spokesperson" who was quoted in the *Southern Patriot* saying he did not want to

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[254] One example of the mind boggling connections HUAC drew to affiliate the Communist Party with the Southern Conference involved a dinner meeting hosted by the Washington Committee: "[The] entertainer at the Washington meeting was Susan Reed, employed by Café Society, a night club owned by Barney Josephson, brother of Leon Josephson, leading Communist, Soviet Secret Service operative, charged with passport frauds….Barney Josephson has been a supporter of the New York branch of the Southern Conference." See U.S. Congress. House of Representative. House Committee on Un-American Activities. 1947. Report on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. 80th Cong., 1st sess. No.592, 10. Hereafter cited as HUAC, Southern Conference Report.

[255] Gellhorn, "Report on a Report," 1217-18.

[256] HUAC, Southern Conference Report, 2.

gang up on Russia and would prefer to live in peace with her as a clear evidence of an insidious Communist operating behind the Conference. Gellhorn in his own investigation identified the anonymous speaker as Senator Claude Pepper who made the remark from the Senate floor. In a subtler tactic, Gellhorn revealed that HUAC only used the *Daily Worker* as a reference to the Southern Conference's activities, thus giving the false impression that the *Daily Worker* was somehow the official organ of the organization. The report virtually ignored the numerous references to the Conference's work in other news outlets including the organization's own paper, the *Southern Patriot*. But through its insidiously bumbling attempt to find a credible link between the Conference and the Communist Party, the HUAC report found a kernel of truth in a resolution passed at the Chattanooga conference calling for an end to the lending of money and war materials to all belligerent sides at the expense of the American people. HUAC, however, predictably made a mountain out of a mole hill and contended that the Southern Conference had followed a "strict and unvarying conformance" to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. This conclusion ignored the fact that the SCHW consciously avoided venturing into foreign policy debate and it played down Graham's resolution condemning fascists and Communists alike. When HUAC could not find anything, it would exaggerate with its vivid imagination. HUAC was never above altering quotes, taking testimonies and writing grossly out of context, and embellishing its sources to support their argument.[257] Predictably, HUAC concluded that the SCHW had closely adhered to the foreign policy of Moscow and it had consistently displayed anti-American and pro-Soviet sentiments.[258]

After meticulously examining the individual charges made by HUAC against the Southern Conference, Walter Gellhorn concluded that the accusation against the organization

[257] HUAC, Southern Conference Report, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9; Gellhorn, "Report on a Report," 1230-31, 1204, 1225, 1199, 1193.
[258] HUAC, Southern Conference Report, 17.

was “insincere” and had no credible evidence to support it. Rather than proving the guilt of the Southern Conference, the committee resorted to attacking the reputations of those who disagreed with it. In its report on SCHW, HUAC had refused to let anyone from the Southern Conference testify and defend the organization’s reputation. Rather than revealing any Communist corruption, the report actually demonstrated that the Committee had “either been intolerably incompetent or designedly intent upon publicizing misinformation.”[259] HUAC report was denounced then and now by commentators as weak and farfetched document. HUAC’s intention, however, was not to provide a dispassionate examination of the SCHW, but to serve as an attack piece. In this objective, HUAC would find success.

Dombrowski and Foreman dismissed the HUAC report as regurgitated lies and denounced HUAC for being the “un-American.” And for a short time, HUAC, because of its complete ineptitude, provided positive publicity for the Southern Conference. Wallace’s speech was a success. Aubrey Williams used the publicity generated by the HUAC report to solicit donations from Conference’s supporters and northern liberals. Donations, however, were not forthcoming. The exchange between Bilbo and Dombrowski might amuse friends of the Conference and liberal northern donors. The HUAC report might be looked down as nothing more than a pathetic diatribe. But the attacks took a toll. Conservatives successfully branded the SCHW as a Communist rabble-rouser in the mind of the southern public. In spite of being ludicrous slander, the HUAC report would frequently be cited by SCHW’s critics and enemies as definitive proof of the Southern Conference’s red guilt. But it was not HUAC that ultimately doomed the liberal organization. It was the retreat of organized labor in the face of conservative onslaught that undercut the Conference at its foundation. Organized unions, flushed by successes during the war, suffered losses as postwar politics indiscriminately mixed labor unions and

[259] Gellhorn, “Report on a Report,” 1233.

communism together. As organized unions sought to reorganize themselves, their association with the controversial Southern Conference became a liability they did not want to have. [260]

Unions and their members had come out of the war in the best position they had ever been in. During the war, the unions experienced an exceptionally pro-labor War Labor Board who consistently ruled in their favor against management. Thanks to the favorable rulings, labor spent most of its war years consolidating its power and membership rather than exerting its energy on costly and disruptive strikes. Industrial workers saw their average weekly wages increased by 65 percent from December 1941 to April 1945, while the cost of living had risen by only 30 percent. The CIO's dues-paying members increased from 1,838,000 in 1939 to 3,937,000 in 1945. In the South, the CIO had expanded its membership base from 150,000 at the eve of World War II to 225,000 at the end of the conflict. More importantly, organized labor gained legitimacy within the American society. Flushed with confidence, the CIO sought to expand its influence by forming the CIO Political Action Committee (CIO-PAC) to campaign against conservative politicians. The CIO-PAC would combine sophisticated organizing techniques and grassroots mobilization to challenge the voting pattern of the South. Conservative southern politicians detested and feared the efforts of the CIO-PAC.[261] "[The CIO-PAC] will seek to purge us and every other self respecting and honest man who runs for office," North Carolina Senator Josiah Bailey fumed.[262]

But for all their gains, labor unions' position in the postwar South was becoming increasingly precarious as the conservatives' iron grip on southern politics strengthened. With

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[260] "Wallace Held 'Renegade,'" NYT, June 12, 1947; Joseph A. Loftus, "House Body Calls Southern Group Communist Front," NYT, June 15, 1947; Mary Spargo, "Wallace Talk Sponsorship Called 'Red'," WP, June 15, 1947; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 171; Adams, Dombrowski, 157.
[261] Barbara S. Griffith, The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and Defeat of the CIO (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 12-13, 21; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 124; Zieger, The CIO, 229; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 172-74.
[262] Zieger, The CIO, 230.

F.D.R. gone and the New Deal coalition lacking a strong leader, labor unions were hard pressed to defend their hard-won gains. After the defeat of Japan in the summer of 1945, the CIO experienced a string of defeats in its attempts to maintain price controls and purchasing power. The wave of strikes during the winter of 1945-1946 by the CIO unions was defensively designed to preserve the buying power of their wages rather than to increase their earning. The most devastating blow came in the summer of 1947 when Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act over the veto of President Truman. The Act required officers of labor unions to sign affidavits affirming that they were not members of the Communist Party or were not affiliated with any organization that believed in or advocated the violent or illegal overthrow of the government of the United States. Those who refused to sign would not be certified as bargaining agents with the National Labor Relations Board and they could not file unfair labor practices complaints against employers before the NLRB. The CIO, with its leftist unions and radical members, became endangered in the anti-Communist climate of postwar America.[263]

As the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union cooled, the national press began to closely scrutinize the CIO's political affiliation. Even among northern liberals, communism in labor was becoming unacceptable. The historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in a 1946 *Life* magazine article, identified the CIO and its leadership as being deeply infiltrated by Communists. Schlesinger charged Lee Pressman, the general counsel of the CIO and a close advisor to the Philip Murray, with being a fellow-traveler and twelve of the fourteen Washington legislative representatives as being Communists.[264] The American Federation of Labor, a rival of the CIO since its conception, warned southern industrialists that they could either "grow and

[263] Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 97-99; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 124; Griffith, The Crisis, 15; Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,"74-75.
[264] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The U.S. Communist Party," Life, July 29, 1946, 88, 90.

cooperate with us or fight for your life against communist forces [of the CIO]."[265] Under a barrage of charges of communism from the left and the right, the CIO was forced to come up with a bold plan to rejuvenate its unions.

In 1938, one labor leader told the southern journalist Jonathan Daniels, "The real threat to the American standard of living does not come from the coolie and the Jap but from the poor white South. They are terribly poor and terribly productive."[266] A low-wage and unorganized South had always been seen as the biggest threat to organized labor in the North. But after World War II, the South was different from the heavily agricultural region that labor had tried to tame during the early twentieth century. By 1945 the North had lost a quarter of a million textile workers while the South simultaneously gained 100,000 textile workers. But the southern textile industry was only 20 percent organized. As industry continued to migrate to the region for its cheap, plentiful, and un-unionized labor force, the South became the CIO's most sought after prize. In 1946, the CIO launched its biggest unionization campaign in the South called Operation Dixie. Operation Dixie was an ambitious investment on the future of the CIO. The union federation budgeted $1,000,000 with the objective of recruiting 1,000,000 new members to the CIO unions. But to succeed Operation Dixie had to alter the damaging perception of the CIO as a Communist-infiltrated organization.[267]

Unlike previous drives, Operation Dixie was a stark departure from the confrontational and often violent strikes in the South. Despite its military-style name, the operation would be the least militant of any CIO drive. Operation Dixie was both a campaign to unionize the South and to improve the public image of the CIO in the region. Leading the Southern Organizing Committee (SOC), which was charged with running Operation Dixie, was Van Bittner, a veteran

[265] Clark, "An Analysis," 184-85.
[266] Daniels, "Democracy is Bread," 489.
[267] Griffith, The Crisis, 20; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 125;

of the United Mine Workers. Bittner made it a top priority to present the CIO as a respectable, 100 percent American, and uncontroversial organization. Instead of amassing those who were ready to match muscle with the company goons, the CIO brought with it a "visiting trade delegation" of economists, business analysts, and technical experts. To make themselves even more presentable, 95 percent of the organizers were war veterans and 85 percent were native southerners. "When trouble [from management and reactionaries] comes, and it will come," Bittner told a reporter, "It seems to us that it will be pretty hard to convince people that men who risked their lives to save the country now want to destroy it."[268] In order to preserve the respectability of Operation Dixie among average white southerners, Bittner distanced the drive from all political activity and controversial racial issues. Avoiding the race issue was especially important for Operation Dixie. The postwar racial violence had shown the CIO how low southerners' toleration was to any challenge to their racial traditions. Furthermore, as racial liberalism was increasingly associated with communism in the South, the CIO felt it had to avoid race if it wanted to avoid the Communist charge. Although never barring blacks from participating or joining the unions, Bittner left it up to the local branches to decide how they would handle the sensitive situation of race. Although black workers would be included in the drive, they were rarely mentioned in the promotional literature and did not figure prominently into the planning of the SOC. As far as the CIO and Bittner were concerned, "there was no Negro problem in the South."[269]

Intensifying his effort to make unions more presentable to the South, Bittner expelled all leftist and radical elements from Operation Dixie. Bittner's action was one of the prime examples of the growing conservatism within the labor unions. Under the hostile climate of the

[268] Bittner is quoted in Milton MacKaye, "The CIO Invades Dixie," The Saturday Evening Post, July 20, 1946, 12; Zieger, The CIO, 232.
[269] Zieger, The CIO, 234.

Cold War, moderate unions within the CIO grew more influential and became outspoken in their demand to exclude left-leaning unions and radical leaders from their fold. Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman, the liberal leadership of the CIO, initially rejected the institution of any exclusionary policy to root out communism. They eventually relented, however, as the reality of the Cold War dawned on them. In 1948, Murray capitulated to conservative pressure and condemned left wingers in the unions. Ignoring past contributions of leftists unions and liberal organizations like the Southern Conference, Bittner feared that these corrupting agents would taint the CIO's "Holy Crusade."[270] The Southern Conference's controversial history with communism made it one of the prime targets for exclusion. "No crowd, whether Communists, Socialists or anybody else, is going to mix up this organizing drive," Bittner publicly declared in the spring of 1946, "That goes for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and any other organization living off the CIO."[271] Bittner's announcement took the Conference by a complete surprise. Foreman bitterly resented Bittner's remark and questioned Bittner's ability to head Operation Dixie. Bittner later apologized for his remark, but the damage was done. And with Bittner's divisive statement, the fruitful and close relationship between the CIO and the Southern Conference was broken.[272]

The Southern Conference, which had thought that it would be a conduit for the CIO in Operation Dixie, was left out of the operation entirely. Aside from being suspect of Communist-taint, the SCHW was also a huge drain on the CIO's financial resources. Supporting the SCHW was a luxury that the CIO could not afford. The one million dollars planned by the CIO for Operation Dixie looked impressive on newspaper headlines, but considering the vast

[270]Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 179-80; NYT, November 23, 1948; Griffith, The Crisis, 62-65; Zieger, The CIO, 233.
[271] "CIO Stands Alone in Organizing South," NYT, April 19, 1946.
[272] Foreman, interview, 74; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 148.

geographical layout of the South and the scale of its operation, the CIO needed every dollar. With the crushing defeat of liberal Democrats and the resurgence of the Republicans during the 1946 midterm election, the conservative southern Democrats came out strongest and most unified. Operation Dixie could not afford to antagonize them while operating in their backyard by using the Southern Conference in its work. By the end of 1946, the Southern Conference was taken off the CIO's approved list of organizations for association, thus permanently ending their partnership.[273]

The Southern Conference, which had sustained itself through most of its existence with the aid of labor unions, found itself in the direst crisis it had ever faced. The financial impact of the loss of union support was immediate and hard. The second half of 1946 saw a 50 percent decline in union contributions. By the end of 1946, donations from the unions had dropped by $10,000. After 1946, the donation from the CIO ceased altogether. The loss of support from the CIO created a domino effect as other unions began to abandon the Southern Conference. The United Steelworkers, which gave $4,000 in 1945 and 1946, gave nothing afterward. Contributions from the United Automobile Workers declined from $5000 in 1945 and $10,000 in 1946, to nothing in 1947. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers gave $4000 in 1945 and in 1946, but only $1,000 in 1947, and then nothing after. So it went, union after union, donations dried up and pledges went unfulfilled. The Conference ended the first quarter of 1947 nearly forty thousand dollars in the red despite vigorous efforts at fundraising in New York, Washington, Hollywood, and Boston. The Southern Conference did not have a substantial financial base in the South from which to draw support in order to cope with the dramatic drop in contributions. Only 106 membership dues were received from the southern states while 204 were collected from those outside. Dombrowski and Foreman worked furiously in 1947 to raise the badly needed

[273]Salmond, Miss Lucy, 165; Sullivan, Days of Hope , 253.

funds. Unfortunately, despite pledging to raise $16,650 by July 1, 1947 or have Dombrowski stepped down as administrator of the Southern Conference and Foreman work without pay, they could only manage to raise $10,744.64 by the time of the deadline\.[274]

The CIO's retreat from liberalism extended to the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax. The NCAPT, although comprised of sixty-five organization, was heavily depended on the unions, especially the CIO, for funding. The hostile relationship between the AFL and CIO, worsened by their competing drives to unionize the South, spread to the Anti-Poll Tax Committee. The AFL left the NCAPT and refused to contribute men and money as long as the CIO remained in it. The NACPT's open door policy regarding Communist membership made the CIO unsure of its association with the Committee. When the CIO began to split into different factions, the NCAPT was caught in the middle of a labor civil war. John Lewis pulled out his miners when the Anti-Poll Tax Committee refused to take his side in Lewis's feud with Philip Murray. The Murray faction, in its turn, demanded that the NCAPT expel all leftwing or radical unions from its coalition and implement an anti-Communist provision. Durr, however, refused to comply with their request and the NCAPT stood by its open door principles. Philip Murray immediately ended the CIO participation and ceased its financial contribution. Despite the wide range of support and the hard work of its devoted members, the NCAPT's was financially crippled by the splintering of the CIO. A ray of hope glimmered when Durr was contacted by the Anti-Defamation League and representatives from other Jewish organizations who were interested in supporting the NCAPT's fight against the poll tax. Unfortunately, like the CIO, they demanded the Anti-Poll Tax Committee to purge all members whose names showed up on the Attorney General's list of suspected Communists. Durr angrily refused their offer and stormed

[274] Adam, Dombrowski, 167; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 126, 159; Dombrowski, "Southern Conference," 24; Adams, Dombrowski, 178-79; Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 149

out of the meeting.[275] "We stood by our principles, you see," Durr recounted, "but the thing was that people didn't stand by us." [276] The NCAPT was absorbed back into the Southern Conference and continued to struggle to survive until the summer of 1948 when the Southern Conference's financial difficulty forced it to end the work of the NCAPT.

As the Conference frantically trying to salvage itself, an unexpected dispute between Clark Foreman and James Dombrowski over Dombrowski's position as executive secretary sapped the Conference of its remaining strength. A day after the New Orleans conference, the executive committee held a meeting to discuss the challenges facing the Conference in the upcoming year. Despite the high spirits of the event, attendance at the New Orleans conference was noticeably down compared to previous conferences. Fewer labor delegates made their way to New Orleans, and most of those who did belonged to radical unions. There were no significant representatives from the national administration. Mrs. Roosevelt and Frank Graham, regular fixtures of the conferences, were no longer present. Only black members remained unwavering in their commitment to the Southern Conference. During the board meeting, Dombrowski was asked to leave the room while his reappointment as the executive secretary of the SCHW was discussed. After Dombrowski left the room, Foreman pushed for the removal of Dombrowski as the dual executive secretary of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF), an offspring of the SCHW focusing on the improvement of education standards in the South, and had him appointed as administrator of the SCEF instead. Branson Price, an experienced fundraiser and the secretary of the New York Committee, was chosen as the new executive secretary. Foreman's public reason for removing Dombrowski from the SCHW was that no man could possibly manage two organizations and do an effective job,

[275] Durr, interview, March 1975, 137, 141-44, 149; Reed, Simple Decency, 76; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 153; Durr, Outside, 188-90.
[276] Durr, interview, March 1975, 143.

ignoring the obvious contradiction that Foreman himself was holding the dual presidency of the two organizations. Privately, however, Foreman wanted to focus the Southern Conference's attention on political actions and Dombrowski did not fit into his plan. While he was a skilled administrator, Dombrowski was not an experienced political organizer. Foreman thought he was better suited at the Education Fund where the pace was slower. When Dombrowski returned, he was notified that by a unanimous decision that he was moved to the Education Fund. Dombrowski took the news with a calm face, but he was inwardly devastated by the lack of faith from many of his long time friends on the board. Defying Foreman's expectation, Dombrowski would plot his return to the executive secretary of the Southern Conference.[277]

After taking five days off to plan his next move, Dombrowski wrote a letter to the board "accepting the action of Board," but he questioned the legality of the board's action since his reassignment was made without a quorum. Furthermore, the Education Fund, although an offspring of the Southern Conference, was a separate entity and the Southern Conference technically had no legal jurisdiction to shift personnel from one organization to another without convening the Education Fund board members. Dombrowski's letter took everyone by surprise and sparked a furious exchange of letters. Many board members who were absent during the ousting of Dombrowski had thought he had left on his own free will. Many now demanded reconsideration. Lucy Mason, who had originally voted with Foreman, was assured by Foreman that it was Dombrowski's idea to transfer. When she learned of Dombrowski's opposition to the transfer, she wrote to every single board member reminding them of Dombrowski's selfless dedication to the Conference and his skillful administration of the Conference through some of

[277] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 152-55; Adams, Dombrowski, 175; Foreman, interview, 75.

its most difficult times. Mason successfully applied sufficient pressure to force a reluctant Foreman to grant a second hearing for Dombrowski.[278]

The Conference was embroiled in a heated and divisive debate over Dombrowski. Board members who either thought Dombrowski was wronged by Foreman or disliked Foreman's brazen attempt to consolidate power sided with Dombrowski. Those who felt that the Southern Conference needed strong and centralized leadership to weather the crisis sided with Foreman. Aubrey Williams, sensing a serious rift in the Conference, advised Dombrowski to accept his new assignment for the sake of harmony in the Conference. But Dombrowski responded coolly that if he did so, Foreman would acquire almost dictatorial power over the Conference. He further warned that if he were removed from his current post, he would resign from the Southern Conference. The subsequent meeting on January 5 was the most contentious and divisive the Southern Conference had ever experienced. Foreman made his case against Dombrowski by contending that the responsibility of being the administrator for two organizations was too much to ask of Dombrowski and he should be allowed to focus on his educational work. Dombrowski shot back that the reason for the creation of the SCEF was so that the Southern Conference could do its political work and still receive tax-deductible funding. The separation of the Southern Conference and the Education Fund was only a legal division; their work very much remained the same as before. The meeting lasted for almost eight hours. The niceties at the beginning of the meeting disappeared as the participants grew more partisan and less polite with each passing hour. Foreman abandoned the early pretense of alleviating Dombrowski's workload and charged Dombrowski with being overpaid and for making clerical errors; Lucy Mason snapped back, reminding Dombrowski had gone two months without salary and was still owed $1,500 in back pay. As the meeting descended into incivility, Aubrey Williams proposed a return to the status

[278] Adams, Dombrowski, 174; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 163-64.

quo with Dombrowski as administrator and Foreman as president of both the SCEF and the SCHW. A tired and frustrated board unanimously approved of Williams' proposal, thus ending, on the surface, the Dombrowski-Foreman conflict.[279]

The clash between Foreman and Dombrowski was intensified by their diametrically opposed personalities and ambitions. James Dombrowski was a deeply religious man who was devoted to the ideal of Christian Socialism. "[Dombrowski's] honesty and integrity is so Simon pure that it gets to be a bore at times," Aubrey Williams once commented.[280] Meticulous almost to a fault, he kept track of every cent spent and scrutinized every decision made by the Conference. Expenses had to justified, kept track of, and then checked and rechecked to ensure that no precious resources were wasted. Dombrowski had no sense of spontaneity. All important undertakings had to be carefully thought out to a fine degree before they got enacted. To Dombrowski, everything had to have its order and had to go through its proper channels. Dombrowski had no political ambition whatsoever. He was perfectly content with his work. While Foreman, as president of the Southern Conference, made a modest annual salary of $8,000, Dombrowski's annual salary was a paltry $2,500. But Dombrowski never brought up the gross discrepancy between their salaries. He had no desire to compete with Foreman.[281]

Clark Foreman's impetuous personality and explosive temper were in sharp contrast to Dombrowski's cool and cautious demeanor. Foreman was an agnostic who did not share Dombrowski's deep faith in Christianity. His bible was the "Bill of Rights." Foreman's willingness to act regardless of the consequences or what others might think was his greatest virtue when confronting with injustices, but it was his greatest flaw when dealing with people

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[279]Foreman, interview, 75; Reed, Simple Decency, 121-23; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 221; Adams, Dombrowski, 175-77.
[280] Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 224.
[281] Durr, interview, March 1975, 188-89; Foreman, interview, 77.

who did not agree with him. On one occasion, Guy Johnson of the Southern Regional Council remembered Foreman violently stormed into his office demanding he retract the name of the Regional Council's new publication, the *New South*, because Foreman had wanted that name for the Southern Conference's upcoming newsletter, which would later become the *Southern Patriot*. Johnson refused to comply and Foreman almost came to blows with the sociologist. The brash and hotheaded Foreman had little patience with Dombrowski's circumspect behavior. Whenever he had a bright idea, Foreman would immediately spring into action and demand Dombrowski give him his full support and resources. Dombrowski, however, would not budge until Foreman supplied him with the detailed information he needed to evaluate Foreman's idea. Foreman's dictatorial decision making style constantly clashed with Dombrowski cautious administration. To bypass Dombrowski, Foreman often made important executive decisions without consulting any of the board members. Few would know of his plans until the executive committee had to meet, by which time it was difficult to go against whatever Foreman was planning. Virginia Durr was amazed at how resourceful Foreman was at getting the money he needed for his plans. Foreman's need for control did not end with the central office, but extended to the state committees. He regularly clashed with Margaret Fisher, the head of the Georgia Committee, who was equally headstrong, over the control of Fisher's committee. Foreman wanted to centralize the control of all the state committees in his hands in order to coordinate their activities and increase their effectiveness. Dombrowski's biographer, Frank Adams, claimed that Foreman had bigger ambitions for the Southern Conference than just fighting against segregation and playing second fiddle to the labor unions. Because Foreman did not have the political connections with the Truman administration he once did with Roosevelt, he wanted to use the Southern Conference, especially the state committees, as a vehicle to the gain political

power to reshape the South. Dombrowski was simply too slow and cautious for the ambitious Foreman. Foreman admitted that he was ruthless and aggressive, but it was to keep the Conference alive during its tenuous existence.[282] "You can't be too namby-pamby and keep a big organization together," said Foreman. Foreman's attempted coup against Dombrowski was nothing personal; it was simply a politically expedient move to make.[283]

The Dombrowski-Foreman feud eroded much of the trust and friendship between different board members. The strained relationships of the staff prevented them from working together effectively to rescue the drowning Conference. The leadership of the SCHW was an especially close knit social circle. Many of them had worked closely together in the New Deal, on the poll tax, and labor. They were ideological kin—men and women whose progressive outlook on race and social issues and whose unwavering tolerance of differences separated them from their fellow southerners. The Dombrowski-Foreman feud severely weakened the bond shared by the Conference's leadership at a time when unity was most crucial.

The financial crisis stymied the Conference's ability to operate. The *Southern Patriot* temporarily ceased operation in May 1947 because the Conference had run out of money for publication. Despite drastic cuts to staff salary by almost 50 percent, some even volunteering to forgo their pays, the state committees could not halt their decline. They could neither pay the meager wages of their staff nor afford to give volunteers the travel expenses needed to get them to their field work. One state committee after another ceased its operation. By September 1947, only the committees in Washington and North Carolina remained in effective operation. The HUAC report, in spite of its numerous outlandish and unsubstantiated claims, scared donors away and renewed the attack from reactionaries. The New Orleans's Young Men's Business

[282] Durr, interview, March 1975, 188-89; Johnson, interview, 61-62; Foreman, interview, 75, 53, 77; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 161-62; Adams, Dombrowski, 172.
[283] Foreman, interview,53.

Club, along with the Knight of Columbus, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the American Legion, resolved to drive the Conference from its New Orleans headquarter through constant harassment. Because of the relentless vilification from newspapers and the volume of hate letters, many volunteers quit showing up at the Conference's office.[284] The situation was so dire that Foreman and Dombrowski temporarily buried their mutual animosity to work together to rescue the Conference from a complete collapse. But it was to no avail. When the two failed to meet their fundraising goal by July 1947, the demoralized pair lost all hope of salvaging the Southern Conference. Their contentious battle had drained both men of any desire to work together or to continue trying to save the Conference. The final schism came with the Henry Wallace 1948 Presidential Campaign with the Progressive Party. The Conference split between the Foreman faction, which wanted to put whatever was left of the Southern Conference behind the election of Henry Wallace, and the Dombrowski faction, which sought to concentrate the last remnant of the Conference on building up the Southern Conference Education Fund.

On December 29, 1947, former Vice President and Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace called for a "Gideon's Army…small in number, but powerful in conviction, and ready for action" to join him in ushering in a "century of the common man" where peace and prosperity would reign over war and wants.[285] Over 1,000 members of the Southern Conference heeded Wallace's trumpet and joined his quixotic quest for the presidency. Before Wallace declared his candidacy, Foreman had already enthusiastically endorsed Wallace. To get Wallace warmed up for the southern leg of the campaign, Foreman set up in the summer of 1947 a SCHW sponsored speaking tour through eight cities in four southern states. Dombrowski and

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[284] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 144, 158, 160-61; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 161, 164; SP 5, no.4 (May 1947); Adams, Dombrowski, 181.

[285] "Text of Wallace's Radio Talk Announcing His Candidacy," NYT, December 30, 1947. Gideon's Army is referring to the troop of an Old Testament Israelite leader who led a group of 300 fearless men in a successful attack against the Midianites. Gideon, the leader of the group, became Israel's new ruler.

Foreman worked together again to ensure a successful tour for Wallace and for the Conference financially. Despite the release of the HUAC report at the beginning of the tour, they managed to raise $10,000 in pledges and donations. Although the money was not enough to save the dying Southern Conference, it gave Foreman hope that there might be a hidden and deep well of support for Wallace in the South. Furthermore, Wallace's racially liberal position and genuine desire to reshape the South politically matched the Southern Conference own outlook and ambition.[286]

Many advanced liberals like Clark Foreman saw Henry Wallace as the natural heir and designated successor to Roosevelt. Wallace would have been president in 1945 if the conservative Democrats had not forced Harry Truman on F.D.R.. Wallace represented the reform-minded idealist that advanced liberals, who were equally idealistic, wanted in their president. Wallace was staunchly against segregation and wanted to continue and expand the programs of the New Deal. Many advanced liberals were frustrated by Truman's constant delay of his promised reforms. Many did not believe he was genuine in his appeal to liberals. In contrast to Truman, "Henry Wallace had supported us all along."[287] For the advanced liberals of the Southern Conference, Wallace represented a promise of renewal. "We are not coming south just to add a few dollars to the SCHW treasury," Lewis Frank, Wallace's manager, said to Foreman during the Wallace speaking tour "We want to help you build… and we want [the people attending our gatherings] to have relationship to political organization and to reflect the ferment in the South."[288] Wallace thus reflected the desire for action and political mobilization that many within the Southern Conference found so attractive. Foreman was convinced that

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[286] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 162; Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 239-43; "Henry A. Wallace Calls For A Free And Equal South," SP 5, no.9 (November 1947): 1; Adams, Dombrowski, 181; Durr, interview, March 1975, 144.
[287] Durr, interview, 144.
[288] Krueger, Promises to Keep, 184.

Wallace was the last hope for liberalism in America and in the South, and the last chance for the Southern Conference to be relevant again. Joining the Wallace campaign "was the only thing that we could do at that time logically," Foreman concluded.[289] Others in the Conference did not think so.

Foreman's push for the SCHW to endorse the Wallace presidential campaign created further divisions within the Southern Conference that were beyond repair. A week after Wallace declared his campaign for the presidency Clark Foreman sent an ultimatum to the Southern Conference executive committee asking them to decide on whom it would endorse in the 1948 presidential election. Foreman bluntly expressed his support for Wallace and his commitment to campaign for him. The executive committee debated the matter for a month, but no consensus was reached between the Wallace and Truman camps within the Conference. Finally, it decided on January 31 to let the state committees decide for themselves their political allegiance.[290]

Foreman quickly resigned his presidency of the Southern Conference and the Education Fund to devote all his time to campaign for Wallace. His resignation was rejected, but he left for Wallace anyway to become the treasurer of the Progressive Party. Board members Palmer Weber, C.B. Baldwin, and Virginia Durr followed him. The Conference's decision to let the state committees decide for themselves did not stem the loss of members. Mary Price, the head of the Committee for North Carolina, resigned her position to work for Wallace. The North Carolina Committee, had already been hit hard by financial difficulty, breathed its last gasp when Mary Price left it leaderless. In May 1948, the Committee for Virginia became the first and only state committee to endorse Henry Wallace. After the vote, all the anti-Wallace members in the committee board resigned from the organization. Those who stayed away from the Wallace

[289] Foreman, interview, 66.
[290] Foreman's letter to the executive committee was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 179.

campaign included Lucy Mason, Aubrey Williams, Clifford Durr, and James Dombrowski. They saw Wallace's campaign as the death knell for the legacy of the F.D.R. and the New Deal. Some estimates had Wallace drawing seven to ten millions votes. Wallace thought he would draw between three and five million votes. By taking votes from Truman, it was feared that Wallace would deliver the presidency to the Republicans and strengthen the conservative Democrats. Aubrey Williams and many New Dealers begged Wallace to reconsider his decision, and warned him that if he ran, they would oppose him tooth-and-nail. They were equally dismayed by the decision of their friends and colleagues in the Southern Conference to embark on a foolish quest at the cost of everything that they had worked so hard for. Many anti-Wallace members left the Southern Conference altogether because of Foreman's fervent support of Wallace.[291]

Henry Wallace's presidential campaign had a remarkably divisive effect on southern liberals. Even among Wallace's close friends and advisors, his decision to run was extremely unpopular. Harold Young, a Texan who had devoted seven years to look after Wallace's political interest, watched in disbelief as Wallace walked down a path that might destroy the F.D.R.'s New Deal. "Mr. Henry Wallace is one of the country's few great men," Young said reverently, "[but] the Progressive Party venture was a terrible mistake." Young would cast a ballot for Truman in the fall of 1948.[292] Virginia Durr's bluest-of-the-blue blooded family was in disbelief when she decided to support Wallace and to run for the Senate in Virginia on the Progressive Party ticket. Durr's brother in law, Justice Hugo Black, called her an "absolute idiot" for abandoning the Democratic Party for Wallace's hopeless campaign. Durr did not think Wallace had a realistic shot of winning the election, but she believed in what he stood for and admired his

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[291] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 149; Durr, interview, March 1975, 215-16; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 180-82; Sullivan, "Gideon's Southern Soldiers," 248, 250-51; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 186; Foreman, interview, 78; John C. Culver and John Hyde, American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry Wallace (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 461.
[292] Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 459.

courage for campaigning in integrated meeting in the most hostile places in the South. Her decision was one of principle over convenience. Aubrey Williams experienced a similar division in his own family and business. His oldest son, Aubrey Williams, Jr., and his co-editor of the *Southern Farmer,* Gould Beech, both came out in support of the Wallace campaign. Beech's harsh criticism of President Truman for not delivering on his civil rights promises and Beech's support for Wallace made an already tense working environment, stemming from previous disagreements, even more difficult. Williams eventually forced Beech from the paper.[293]

Wallace's quest for the presidency was one of the most trying presidential campaigns in modern history. It faced constant attacks from both sides of the political spectrum. Although his campaign was red-baited by both liberals and conservatives alike, the red-baiting done by liberals was more intense, more desperate. They were determined to sink Wallace to save Truman. Liberal newspapers and columnists mounted an unorganized campaign to associate the Wallace campaign with everything red. "The Communist Party—let's tell the truth—initiated the movement for Wallace," railed Dorothy Thompson, a prominent newspaper columnist, "No other group called for it."[294] Alfred Friendly of the Washington Post headlined his article with "Reds Picked Wallace To Run, May Quit Him." In it he drew a connection from the Communist opposition to the Marshall Plan to the Communist creation of a third party with Wallace at its helm.[295] Wallace tried desperately to separate himself from the Communist Party to little avail. He called on the presidential candidates to pledge not to work with anyone who advocated the violent overthrow of the United States government (i.e. Communists) or who supported the suppression of another human being. Little attention was paid to Wallace's pledge by the two

[293] Durr, interview, March 1975, 202-04, 218; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 202-03.
[294] Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 465.
[295] Alfred Friendly, "Reds Picked Wallace To Run, May Quit Him," WP, May 2, 1948.

mainstream candidates. It was seen by the press as nothing more than a cheap ploy.[296] But the abuse from the liberal press paled in comparison to the harassment and attacks on Wallace and his supporters throughout the country. At a campaign rally in Evansville, Indiana, a mob of 2,500 surrounded the speaking venue and protested Wallace's presence. Some of the crowd stormed through the speaking event and slugged several Southern Conference members and Wallace's aides before the police clubbed their way through the mob and cleared the area. Things were worst in the South. At a rally in Norfolk, Virginia, the police, instead of controlling the crowd, were threatening to break up the integrated meeting with violence if the participants did not segregate immediately. In Alabama, a Wallace campaign worker was arrested and sentenced for six months for distributing pro-Wallace "Communist literature." Another encounter turned deadly when a twenty-eight-year-old Wallace supporter was murdered by a drunken union member. During the trial, instead of prosecuting the murderer, the deceased victim was charged by the defense of being guilty of causing his own death by supporting Wallace. The perpetrator received a light three-year sentence for his crime.[297] When Wallace embarked on his southern campaign, he was heckled and egged by angry southerners who resented him for holding integrated rallies. In one occasion, Wallace snapped after a young child threw an egg at him. He grasped a bystander and shouted, "Are you an American? Am I in America?" The man shoved Wallace away.[298]

Wallace's claim that he was the only tried-and-true liberal in the race was compromised by Truman's unexpected and aggressive push for civil rights. Truman had remained relatively

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[296] Durr, interview, March 1975, 211-12; Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 464. Henry Wallace's pledge was: "I Shall not knowingly accept the support of any individual or group advocating the limitation of democratic action for any other individual or group; nor the support of any individual or group which would restrict the civil liberties of others for reasons of race, color or creed; nor the support of any individual or group advocating the violent overthrow of the government of the United States."See NYT, March 19, 1948.
[297] Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 467-70; Durr, interview, March 1975, 209-10.
[298] Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 494.

quiet on the issue of civil rights through the early campaign as he was trying to hold to the Democratic coalition that was incredibly divided between urban liberals and African Americans of the North and the conservative Democrats of the South. In mid-August 1948, the White House Counsel Clark Clifford presented to Truman a memo calling on the President to stake out an aggressive liberal position on key domestic social and economic issues and ignore the criticism of his foreign policy. The goal was to win a large plurality of African Americans in the North to offset inevitable loss in the South. Truman followed Clifford's advice by delivering a major address in Harlem emphasizing his civil rights record and praising his Civil Rights Committee's report. In Congress Truman pushed for a forty-dollar tax cut for every taxpayer, an increase in corporate taxes, a higher minimum wage, the implementation of the many recommendations made by his Civil Rights Committee, national health insurance, and price and rent controls. It did not matter if the proposed bills had a shot of passage or not, it was more important for the record. The strategy was a success. Truman's plurality of black votes in California, Illinois, and Ohio proved decisive in his triumph over Thomas Dewey Henry Wallace, and Strom Thurmond who ran as a Dixiecrat. The loss of the black votes especially was crushing for Durr and Foreman. Both of them had worked hard at the risk of physical danger to stage integrated campaign rallies throughout the South in order to raise black support for Wallace. But Wallace did not just lose the black vote. As much as one third of the people who said they would support Wallace in October shifted their allegiance back to Truman by November. In the end, Truman's civil rights overture and electability won out over Wallace's idealism.[299] The defeat of Wallace was a serious blow to the advanced liberals who supported him. They saw in him a hope for a reenergized advanced southern liberalism. Like them, Wallace spoke through his actions and his

[299] Sitkoff, "Truman and the Election of 1948," 610- 14; Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 466; Durr, interview, March 1975, 217; Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 500-01.

courage. He stood for the New Deal at a time when the idea of New Deal seemed to have passed away with F.D.R.. His position against segregation inspired advanced liberals to rally around him. His defeat showed advanced liberals how far away their dreams were.

"The Southern Conference went down in '48 on the shoals of Wallace," Foreman reminisced, "It went all out in the Wallace campaign and when that was such a fiasco there was nothing for us to do but to fold up."[300] When Foreman left the Southern Conference, it was fourteen thousand dollars in debt. Income from the past six months totaled $8,588, with only $771 coming from membership dues. Many of its board members and state committee leaders had left for the Wallace campaign thus depleting it of vital leadership. The Southern Conference for Human Welfare existed as nothing more than a corporate ghost through most of 1948.[301] The funeral finally came on November 21, 1948, exactly ten years after its conception. At the Richmond meeting a final resolution stated that the Wallace campaign had "largely absorbed the political energies of the members of the SCHW and make its continuation unnecessary and a duplication of effort." [302] The Southern Conference's legacy would persist in the form the Southern Conference Education Fund.

The Education Fund was established on January 26, 1946 in Durham, North Carolina as a way to expand the SCHW's educational work with tax exempt status after the Southern Conference's increased political activities caused the IRS to revoke its tax exemption. Clark Foreman would be the president of both organizations, Dombrowski would be their administrator, and they would have the same board. There were few distinctions in leadership and structure between the SCHW and the SCEF. Although originally created to exploit the tax-exemption loophole, the Education Fund's significance grew in 1947 when SCHW was in danger

[300] Foreman, interview, 66.
[301] Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 181.
[302]The Richmond resolution was reproduced in Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 185.

of collapsing. After resigning from the Conference, James Dombrowski became a full time administrator of the Education Fund and Aubrey Williams became the president. As a condition of his resignation, Dombrowski got to transfer the *Southern Patriot* from the SCHW to the Education Fund. Dombrowski worked hard to disassociate the Education Fund from the dying Southern Conference. He did not want the sickness that killed the Conference to spread to the Education Fund. Lucy Mason provided the blue print to rebuild a new and leaner southern liberal organization. Mason, disillusioned with the Southern Conference's aggressive and costly political model, proposed a more South-focused and decentralized organization that would work on a few specific issues in the region, but would handle those issues well. Mason contended that the Southern Conference's ambition was generating too much expectation from its members and donors. Failure to live up to those grandiose expectations hurt the organization's standing among members and donors. The new organization should not plan outrageous budget and fundraising drives, but should live within the means provided by its supporters within the South.[303] The new Southern Conference should be "a small, militant, standard-bearing organization in the South," Mason proclaimed.[304] Dombrowski had had enough of the fruitless political battles that divided more often than they united. The Education Fund would be a tamer and quieter version of the Southern Conference.

The Education Fund carried on the Southern Conference's firm commitment to end white supremacy and segregation, but it had little appetite for political mobilization. Aubrey Williams steered the SCEF clear of any involvement with the Wallace campaign. This decision prevented the SCEF from imploding along with the Wallace's coalition after the failed 1948 election. The

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[303] "SCHW Adopts By-laws, Elects New Officers At Durham Meeting," SP 4, no. 2 (February 1946): 6; Adams, Dombrowski, 165; Krueger, Promises to Keep, 137-38; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 221; Durr, interview, March 1975, 216; Salmond, Miss Lucy, 161-62, 165; Douty, "Southern Conference Report," 164-65; Adams, Dombrowski, 183.

[304] Salmond, Miss Lucy, 66.

Education Fund, heeding Mason's words, avoided making grandiose schemes and held no mass membership drive. Adopting the spirit of its administrator, James Dombrowski, the Education Fund was content with working hard on a limited number of concrete issues like desegregation, education, and health services. The *Southern Patriot* became the Education Fund's primary tool to reach its audience and advocate for its policies. The SCEF managed to lure back some of the former disaffected members of the Southern Conference who left during the contentious times between 1947 and 1948. By the mid-fifties, the SCEF had established itself as one of the most outspoken proponents of desegregation in the South. The SCEF would go on to survive for three decades, lasting well into the mid-seventies.[305] But, as one historian of the South wrote, the SCEF was "a small and harmless anti-segregation agency."[306] Although it did not make a big splash like the Southern Conference, the Education Fund continued to work tirelessly for social justice and racial equality in the South. Throughout the decades of the Civil Rights Movement, the SCEF played an active part in the movement. It would hold workshops for activists, set up legal aid fund and bail, arranging for economic relief funds from north black communities to help poor southern blacks who were resisting the power of white planters. Its impact, however, was small when compared to the monumental achievements of organizations like the NAACP and the SCLC. Furthermore, the ghost of communism that lingered from the Southern Conference continued to haunt the Education Fund. Mainstream civil rights organizations, wanting to avoid controversy, preferred to steer away from the SCEF, thus limiting the Education Fund's effectiveness.[307]

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[305] Irwin Klibaner, "The Travail of Southern Radicals: The Southern Conference Educational Fund 1946-1976," The Journal of Southern History 49, no. 2 (May, 1983):179-86.
[306] Bartley, The New South, 53.
[307] Klibaner, "The Travail," 193-202.

Many in the South continued to believe that the Education Fund was a Communist front. SCEF's advanced racial position put the organization permanently at odds with the southern establishment. "Time will reveal the [Education Fund] to have Communists influential in its policies," the Atlanta Constitution editorialized in 1950, "[its] real purpose, we believe is to stir up trouble, to agitate the race question and to 'bait' the South."[308] Senator James Eastland showed he had not forgotten about the Education Fund when he summoned Aubrey Williams, James Dombrowski, Myles Horton, Clifford and Virginia Durr to an inquiry before the Senate Internal Security subcommittee task force at New Orleans on March 18, 1954. When they arrived at New Orleans they were greeted by a "task force" of one, James Eastland. Eastland's investigation into the SCEF echoed the HUAC report with his mind stretching connections of guilt-by-association. The guilt of those summoned was already presumed long before the first hearing began. Richard Arens, the counsel of the committee, had promised reporters he would deliver "four or five Fifth Amendment Communists" by the end of the hearings. Eastland's attempt to red-bait the SCEF members in a series of hearings failed to produce any substantial evidence that linked the SCEF to the "Communist conspiracy." Nevertheless, he reestablished the fictitious connection between the advanced liberalism of the SCEF and Communists in the minds of many southerners.[309]

The charge of communism, which had dominated the Southern Conference since its conception, was not what ultimately destroyed it. It was the Southern Conference's strict adherence to its ideal of an open and free organization that welcomed those who wanted to help regardless of their beliefs that proved fatal. Its refusal to red-bait was seen by its critics as an admission of guilt rather than a courageous stand against fear and oppression. The end of the

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[308]" Editorial," AC, February 26, 1950.
[309] "Ordeal by Slander: Eastland & The SCEF," SP 12, no. 4 (April 1954): 1; Sokol, There Goes, 39-40; Sosna, In Search, 70.

Southern Conference for Human Welfare was the end of one of the few times in southern history where men and women of goodwill stood up against injustice not because they directly suffered it, not because it was in their economic interest to do so, but because it was the morally right thing to do. Unlike so many idealistic movements before and after, the Southern Conference did not compromise under pressure to conform. When liberals from all across the country retreated behind the safety of anti-Communist sentiment, the Conference refused to arbitrarily expel its members because of their creeds. But by refusing to compromise, the Southern Conference set itself on an all-or-nothing path. The condition of the time was not favorable to this uncompromising stance. By leaving itself no other choice, when the option of all died with Henry Wallace, the Southern Conference was left with almost nothing.

Conclusion

"[The South] is a land with a unity despite its diversity, with a people having common joys and common sorrows, and, above all, as to the white folk a people with a common resolve indomitably maintained—that it shall be and remain a white man's country,"[310] wrote the southern historian Ulrich Philips in 1928, ten years before the founding of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama. Through most of the region's history, the notion that the South was and would always remain a white man's country was universally held by almost every person. Millions of poor southerners were disenfranchised, countless men and women were lynched, and innumerable acts of discrimination, both petty and infamous, were committed in order to keep the region in the hands of whites. It is rare, then, to find a vigorous voice speaking out against the region's numerous short comings at the cost of its own well being.

White liberals of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare were born during a time when Jim Crow ruled the South with an iron grip. They had witnessed the worst of their beloved region: its abject generational poverty, its unrepentant violent nature, and its irrational refusal to change. What motivated each one of them to act was the belief that there was goodness in

[310] Ulrich Philips, "The Central Theme in Southern History," American Historical Review, 24 (October 1928): 31.

southerners. Advanced southern liberals believed that the southerners did not freely choose to be poor and racist. It was those at top of southern society who were responsible for the South's plight—the industrialists who wanted to keep the region's wages unconscionably low and the never challenged incumbent politicians who nostalgically dreamed of a purer Antebellum South. Advanced liberals, unlike their cautious counterparts, sought outside forces that had the power to help it shake the South out of its self-destructive path. "The progressive forces of the South must have the support, financial and moral, of the progressive forces of the rest of the country," Clark Foreman declared.[311] Advanced liberals looked to the New Deal as the golden opportunity to remake the South

The Southern Conference for Human Welfare was founded as an extension of F.D.R.' New Deal. The Conference, unlike anything that preceded it, was unabashedly progressive. In a letter to Brook Hays four months before the Birmingham conference, H.C. Nixon emphasized that the conference was "frankly intended to foster a progressive movement in the South, with no reactionaries needing to apply. We are not going in for a balanced discussion program; [we] do not want to let in any Trojan horses to wreck the job."[312] The Conference hoped that through the power of the federal government, poverty could be combated, lynching could be abated, and disenfranchisement ceased. But the federal government had its limits. By the early 1940s, conservative Democrats allying with Republicans stopped the New Deal from going any farther. Legislation like the anti-poll-tax and the anti-lynching bills were delayed and killed by conservatives in Congress. The Conference, seeing that the South could not be cajoled from the outside alone, sought to create change from within.

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[311] Foreman, "Decade of Hope," 149-50.
[312] Sullivan, Gideon, 41.

"[Cautious] liberalism has aristocratic traditions," Gunnar Myrdal observed, "As a movement it is as yet almost entirely within the upper classes. Its main weakness lies in its lack of mass support."[313] Many cautious liberals were a part of the southern ruling elite. They believed that they could resolve the South's problem without having to consult the lower class. Advanced liberals, however, rejected this elitist notion and sought to empower all southerners. Under the leadership of James Dombrowski and Clark Foreman, the SCHW embarked on a campaign to register traditionally disenfranchised voters. The organization believed that once empowered, these voters would be in a position to demand economic fairness and civil rights. Although the SCHW campaign never got to a level that posed a serious threat to the southern political establishment, it was the first attempt made by a liberal, middle-class organization to challenge the status quo with more than just words and private indignation. Ultimately, Morton Sosna concluded, "though it tried, [SCHW] uncovered no massive Silent South to support its goals."[314] Although it failed to find a hidden progressive voice in the region, the SCHW's political activity helped register tens of thousands of voters, aided in the repeal of Georgia's poll tax, and combated anti-union and anti-voter legislation.

One of the Southern Conference's often overlooked accomplishments is its early stance against racial inequality and segregation in the South. The Conference did not come to its advanced racial position overnight. In its early years, the Conference tried to avoid exciting the South with its stances on race while it focused its energy on repealing the poll tax. After the Second World War, the Conference faced the decision of supporting either African Americans who were beginning to assert their rights or cautious liberals who urgings moderation and patience. The men and women of the Southern Conference emphatically chose the former.

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[313] Myrdal, American Dilemma, 473.
[314] Sosna, In Search, 103.

There were four reasons for this leftward shift. First, many cautious liberal members like Mark Ethridge had left the Southern Conference by 1942 over issue of Communist membership. Their exit left behind a more ideologically committed liberal core in the Southern Conference. Second, the increase in African-American membership made the Conference more sensitive to plight of southern blacks. Third, the vocal and active involvement of advanced liberals like Lillian Smith who wanted to do away with Jim Crow pushed the issue to the forefront of the Conference's agenda. And finally, James Dombrowski and Clark Foreman, both committed to ending segregation, became leaders of the Conference during the pivotal years of World War II when the Conference was mapping out its strategy for the postwar years. The Southern Conference is rarely remembered for its advanced opposition to segregation because it never took to the street to protest or encouraged civil disobedience against Jim Crow. Its legacy does not leave behind indelible images of children being hosed down by "Bull" Connor or the deadly attack during the Selma to Montgomery marches. Furthermore, the Southern Conference was in decline when it made its stand against segregation at the end of 1946. The Conference spent most of its time in 1947 trying to salvage itself from the fatal blow delivered by the labor unions. It was limited to making attacks against segregation in the *Southern Patriot*. When the infrastructure of the SCHW was transferred to the SCEF, the anti-Jim Crow spirit was transferred along with it, however, reforms instituted by Dombrowski to emphasize the Fund's role as an educational organization diminished the Fund's spirit of activism. The SCHW's short legacy against Jim Crow may not have the dramatic and stirring moments of the Civil Rights Movement, but it was no less courageous for taking positions that were almost universally unpopular among white southerners.

What ultimately distinguished the SCHW and its members was that, unlike any other southern interracial organizations preceding it, the Southern Conference was "an organization for action."[315] In contrast to the cautious liberals who advocated slow and steady evolutionary changes, the advanced liberals of the Southern Conference sought to act on their beliefs and create changes in the present. Their movement against the poll tax, their long shot political campaign against conservative Democrats, and their unprecedented stand against segregation at a time when cautious liberals were abandoning the issue reflected the Southern Conference's willingness to take action to bring reforms to the South. Individually, the advanced liberals of the SCHW tried to implement small changes in their own private lives. In 1948, appalled by living condition of blacks in Alabama and the relative inaction of the Federal Housing Authority to construct affordable housing for them, Aubrey Williams mortgaged his own house for five thousand dollars and borrowed another fifteen thousand dollars from friends to start the American Family Homes. With his own life investment and the saving of others, Williams proceeded to build fifty-nine housing units in Birmingham, Alabama and sold all but two of them at low cost to black families. Also in 1948, Clark Foreman, seeing that there was no theatre in Washington D.C. serving the black population, bought and desegregated the DuPont theatre where he was working as a manager during the Henry Wallace presidential campaign. The Southern Conference's need to act was complimented by its unwavering commitment to not compromise on its beliefs.[316]

The immediate cause of the Southern Conference's demise in 1948 was its loss of funding from labor unions, which were afraid of Communist-taint. The indirect cause was the Conference's refusal to exclude members based on their personal beliefs. The Conference never

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[315] Dombrowski, "Southern Conference," 18.
[316] Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 209; Foreman, interview, 79, 83.

supported a Communist agenda, but its idealism prevented it from barring Communists for no other reason than them being a Communist. It did not want to be guilty of the same intolerance and discrimination that its opponents were committing. The Conference strived to live up to Frank Porter Graham's belief that Communists must be faced in the open and defeated with the force of reason and integrity rather than expelled behind veils of gossip and accusations. The Conference and its members paid a high price for their idealism.

The end of the Southern Conference did not end the harassment of its former members. James Dombrowski, Aubrey Williams, Clifford and Virginia Durr were put through a sham hearing at New Orleans in 1954 conducted by James Eastland. Clifford Durr experienced a minor heart attack while defending his and his wife's honors against the fallacious accusation made by professional-informers. After the Eastland hearing, some prominent members like Doctor Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College resigned their memberships from the SCEF. It was now too controversial to be associated with the Fund. The eminent Frank Graham was not spared by race-baiting conservatives when he defended his Senate seat in 1950. His challenger, Willis Smith, ran ad after ad attacking Graham's suspicious association with dubious organizations like the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, which Smith trumpeted as a Communist-led organization. Graham was eventually defeated by a campaign of vicious race-baiting and red-baiting attacks from Smith and a young Jesse Helms, serving as Smith's campaign strategist. Aubrey Williams lost both of his newsletters, the *Southern Farmer* and the *Southern Farm and Home Almanac*, and his printing business because of his staunch position against segregation. The *Farmer* folded in 1948 because William's opposition to segregation alienated most of his readers. The demise of the *Home Almanac* and the printing business were

due to the severe decline in business after the Eastland hearing.[317] The venerable advanced liberal Will Alexander who came out against segregation in 1944 in his *Harper's* article, "Our Conflicting Racial Policy," did not escape attack from reactionaries in his retirement. Alexander was forced to resign his trusteeship of the University of North Carolina after harassments by a fellow trustee. University officials and faculty members, who had once enjoyed visiting his nearby New Hope farm, ceased to pay public homage to the legendary southern liberal. His biographers concluded that despite his rigorous and busy schedule, "there remained a certain loneliness in his last years."[318] Although most advanced liberals in the Southern Conference, with the exception of Joseph Gelders, never got beaten or murdered while fighting for their beliefs like some of the civil rights activists that followed them, they paid a high personal price for their idealism. But in the face of fierce opposition, they had a defiant courage that would not let them give up on their beliefs. While her husband was waiting to be transported to the hospital after his heart attack at the Eastland hearing, Virginia Durr told the doctor to wait for her while she confronted Eastland, "I just want them to see me walking in there with my own two feet to let them know that they haven't gotten me down."[319]

Advanced southern liberals were exceptional within southern liberalism. They defied traditional southern liberalism by embracing interracial cooperation and worked with black members on an equal basis. Instead of just debating issues and waiting for gradual changes, they organized campaigns to empower southerners of both races. They rejected the notion that the South was a white man's country and advocated a racially united society. Where cautious

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[317] Julia M. Pleasants, and Augustus M. Burns, III, Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in the North Carolina (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 169; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 248-49; Sosna, In Search, 171.

[318] See Will Alexander, "Our Conflicting Racial Policies," Harper's Magazine, January 1945, 172-179; the quote is from Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 300.

[319] Durr, Outside, 264.

liberals believed it was the poor, illiterate white southerners who were the cause of the region violence and racism, advanced liberals saw the common people as victims of oppression from above. When their beliefs were challenged, they did not surrender them for expediency; they stayed true even when it cost them dearly. Advanced liberals were also quintessential southerners. They continued to love the South and dwell in it even as it rejected them. Ralph McGill described cautious liberals' hate-love relationship with the South as that of loving parents of a crippled child who mourned their child's deformity, but loved her more fiercely and defensively because of it. Advanced liberals, however, refused to give up on the child and accept her deformity as permanent. They were the parents who loved their child even more deeply and fought with everything they had in order to do the painfully impossible: to teach her how to walk.[320]

[320] McGill, South and the Southerner, 24.

Appendix 1

The Plight of Cautious Liberals

While the Southern Conference was engaging in its political campaign and forging new grounds with its advanced position on integration, southern cautious liberals were aghast by the assertiveness of African Americans and their demand for the end of Jim Crow. Cautious liberals feared that if black anger was not restrained, then racial war was inevitable and African Americans would suffer the worst of it. World War II and the postwar years, instead of being a time of progress, marked a long retreat for cautious liberals. They switched from advocating for black rights to counseling the African-American community to be cautious and conservative in their plea for change, to be patient in their wait, but most importantly, to accept that segregation would continue to exist for decades, if not a century more.[321]

Leading the cautious liberals' retreat were the southern journalists. In a region where the radio did not reach a majority of its population well until the 1940s and where only one in twenty-five farms had electricity, newspapers were the only means of mass communication for the southern public. Southern journalists had substantial clout over public debate and could influence public policy in their immediate region or state. And for over two decades before World War II, the liberal southern press used their pens as an instrument for social progress. The KKK was demonized as ignorant terrorists whose actions ran counter to the gentile tradition of the South. Lynching mobs were severely chastised for their disregard for the law and human lives. And the demagogues were excoriated for their corruptions and incompetence. Occasionally, liberal journalists even mildly urged their readers to reexamine their racial policy and called for better education, housing, and economic security for African Americans. To them, the economic and physical oppressions of southern blacks were not only an embarrassment to the

[321] Brearley, "Negro's New Belligerency," 341; Johnson, interview,18.

region, but were dragging the region down as a whole. Cautious liberals pointed out to southerners that whites could not hold blacks down in the mud without being down there with them.[322]

The journalists' acerbic criticism of the South's short comings and occasional calls for reexamination of race relationships steered clear serious and critical examination of race relations in the South. It was easier to blame the demagogues, whose fortune could shift with public opinion, the nocturnal terror of the hooded KKK, or the lynching mob whose ephemeral existence ended once the honor and purity of white womanhood was restored, than to examine segregation critically. Nevertheless, liberal southern journalists saw themselves as the voice of the downtrodden southern blacks. Cautious liberal journalists often felt that only sympathetic white leaders like them who had the ears of the leaders from both side could bridge the two worlds of blacks and whites. They believed that without the support of white leaders, black leaders would not able to elicit improvements for their race from the white populace. But for their support, cautious liberals demanded loyalty from southern blacks. Cautious liberals wanted southern blacks to condemn their militant cousins up North for stirring trouble against the South. Cautious liberals often pitted conservative southern black leaders against the "radical" and fringe northern black organizations like the NAACP and black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* to claim that both races of the South were working together to solve the region's problems and did not need any interference from outsiders. It was not surprising, then, that these liberal cautious liberals did not foresee that formerly voiceless blacks would grow to become a mighty chorus of discord. Not knowing how to handle this new, more militant wave of protest, the cautious journalists turned their pen against those who pushed the racial agenda beyond South's

[322] Egerton, Speak Now, 25; Sosna, In Search, 57; Dabney, Liberalism in the South, 239.

intolerably low comfort level. The gadfly had become the guard dog of southern customs and traditions.[323]

The editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Mark Ethridge, while the chairman of the FEPC, caused a sensation when he publicly declared that all-or-nothing black leaders must recognize that "there is no power in the world—not even in all the mechanized armies of the earth, Allied and Axis—which would now force the Southern white people to the abandonment of the principle of segregation."[324] The black press, universally incensed by Ethridge's remark, mercilessly condemned him and demanded his immediate resignation. Ethridge, a former member of the Southern Conference and a highly respected southern liberal, was supposed to look out for blacks' interest as the head of the FEPC; instead, Ethridge announced that the FEPC would never try to break the pattern of segregation in the South.[325] Virginius Dabney, in an equally controversial article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, titled "Nearer and Nearer the Precipice," came to the defense of Mark Ethridge and his remark. Dabney warned that a small group of black agitators from the North and another group of white rabble-rousers from the South were pushing the country to the brink of interracial explosion and unless counsels of the moderates prevailed, "we may have the worst internal clashes since the Reconstruction."[326] Dabney compared "Extremist Negro leaders" with rabid racists like Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge and Governor Frank Dixon of Alabama as being equally guilty of arousing racial animosity. Dabney feared that radical blacks would alienate southern white leaders who had "been responsible for much of the steady progress of the Negro in the past, and who can bring about a

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[323]See John Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), for the most in-depth study and analysis of southern liberal journalists from the period between World War I and World War II.
[324] "Ask Ethridge Ouster; Called 'Pussyfooter,'" CD, Jul 25, 1942;
[325] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 198.
[326] Virginius Dabney, "Nearer and Nearer the Precipice," Atlantic Monthly, January 1943, 94.

great deal more such progress in the future…"[327] While Dabney conceded that the maintenance of segregation meant that whites had an obligation to provide equal facilities for the two races, something they had failed to do, he cautioned his black readers that sustainable reform cannot be won by executive fiat, but only by gradual evolutionary development.[328]

Following Ethridge's and Dabney's drumbeat of retreat were the cautious liberal journalists Jonathan Daniels of the *Chattanooga News,* John Temple Graves of the *Birmingham Age-Herald,* Hodding Carter of the *Greenville Delta Democrat-Times* , and Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*. The journalists feared that the country was sitting on top of a volcano waiting to go off. But instead of searching for the culprits of this potential racial Apocalypse among the South's endless number of race-baiting demagogues, murderous members of the KKK, or the intolerable policy of Jim Crow, they aimed their pens at the black press. The black press, with its popular "Double-V" campaign and fierce stance against snail-pace gradualism, became the primary threat to southern peace in the eye of the journalists. They saw the black press's willingness to use the war to win concessions from the country was nothing less than extortion.[329] In "Nearer and Nearer the Precipice", Dabney feared that the tone of the black press was "so extreme that riots probably would break out if they were widely read by the whites."[330] Southern whites, Dabney wrote, would never accept the abolishment of segregation within this century. Any attempt to force them to accept desegregation would inevitably lead to bloodshed and violence. Dabney further cautioned the black press that, although southern liberals like him conceded that African Americans had suffered countless injustices from the hands of whites,

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[327] Ibid., 98.
[328] Ibid., 100.
[329] Ibid., 97; Norfolk Journal and Guide, August 15, 1942; CD, December 20, 1941; Roberts and Klibanoff, Race Beat, 23; John Temple Graves, "The Southern Negro and the War Crisis," Virginia Quarterly Review 18 (Fall 1942), 508.
[330] Dabney, "Nearer and Nearer," 97.

they could not, however, be anything but extremely alarmed by the speed with which the black press was pushing things to their potentially fatal climax.[331]

The cautious liberal journalists did not foresee the rise of black protest in the years before World War II. They had expected African Americans to close ranks and support the war as they did in the First World War. Thus, once African Americans protested instead of playing their part, cautious liberals did not know how to properly respond. They did not know to fit black protest into their vision of the South's future. On some days they condemned black militancy and the dangerous consequences it would bring; on other days they extolled the sacrifices and patriotism of African Americans. At other times, cautious journalists loudly condemned atrocities committed by southern whites while reminding African Americans that they were all that stood between southern blacks and the region's legions of racist and ignorant whites. [332] In their criticism of militant blacks and outspoken black newspapers, cautious liberals were often guilty of excessive bias and lack of common sense. In their evaluation that militant blacks were as dangerous as the KKK, cautious journalists blatantly ignored the fact that there had never been a black-led riot or lynching prior to the 1960s. All major racial incidents involving massive destruction of properties and lives had been instigated by white Americans. Furthermore, the cautious liberals' fear that the black press was arousing the animosity of the white community was more paranoia than fact. With the exception of white newspaper editors and a few other southern liberals, black newspapers had virtually no readership and no influence in any white community in the South. Black newspapers were incapable of arousing any feeling from southern whites on a daily basis unless their editorials were reprinted in white newspapers. Most white Americans were completely oblivious to what was written about them in the black press.

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[331] Virginius Dabney, "Press and Morale," Saturday Review of Literature, July 4, 1942, 5-6, 24-25.
[332] Ralph McGill, Atlanta Constitution, October 24, 1942; Sullivan, Days of Hope, 162; Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 235.

Cautious liberal journalists often claimed that they wanted to find a rational middle ground where the "more level-headed members of both groups" could convene and prevent the South from plunging in to civil strife.[333] They could not, however, heal black wounds with one hand while aggravating their pain with the other. Their quest for the elusive rational middle ground was ultimately futile. Cautious liberals simply did not understand why African Americans were so angry and why they could not wait a "century" before Jim Crow would pass away.[334] White cautious liberals failed to sympathize with the reality that African Americans wanted more than just economic and personal security. They wanted to be treated like human beings. This was a lesson that the Southern Conference had learned, but most cautious liberals refused to accept. Instead, cautious liberals built up black protest into a dark portent of racial violence and destruction.

To understand why cautious liberals directed most of their criticism at the militant black press and black leaders instead of white industrialists and race-baiting politicians, one must first examine their view of black-white relationships at the lowest class. Most cautious liberals had a pragmatic view of race relationships rather than a abstract devotion to liberal principles. Their desire for better race relations stemmed from their desire to advance the South. The source of racial tension, according to many cautious liberals, was the poor and ignorant whites who had to compete economically with similarly poor and ignorant blacks. Although southern whites had removed blacks as a threat at the poll, they could not do so on the cotton fields or the factory floors. Economic competitions between the dirt poor of the two classes inevitably led to violence clashes.[335] "Those who work in the South, who work for the South, know that all these things, racial lynchings, chasing off after promises, all this cruelty, spring from the same soil, economic

[333] Virginius Dabney, RTD, August 24, 1942.
[334] Dabney, interview, 81-82.
[335] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, xx, 27; Dabney, Liberalism in the South, 238.

fear," Ralph McGill wrote, "The poor whites and poor Negroes resent one another, both wanting the same jobs and food."[336] Many cautious liberals had seen firsthand poor whites' capacity for violence and they were terrified of it. But for cautious liberals like Howard Odum, W.T. Couch, and Virginius Dabney, poor whites' violence tendency did not mean the South's racial system was broken; instead, it was an unfortunate result of underdevelopment and poverty, things fixable by economic security. They believed that the destitution of the South began with agriculture and the solution lay with the reformation and improvement of the rural South. Cautious liberals were confident that economic improvements alone would be sufficient to ameliorate racial tension and time would eventually erase former prejudices. Cautious liberals would act as the leaders in the mean time to regulate tension between the two races and advocate for better economic security and social services for blacks in exchange for peace and quiet from southern blacks.[337]

The unexpected rise in racial tensions during and after World War II threatened cautious liberals' idealistic, if not simplistic, view of race management. Cautious liberals feared that vocal black demands were disrupting the delicate balance between poor blacks and white southerners. If blacks continued to push for redress, then poor whites would lash out at them for being too "uppity." The example of the Columbia Riot in 1946 was looked to as confirmation of their worst fear. Cautious liberals like Mark Ethridge and Virginius Dabney frantically tried to regain control of the debate by warning blacks to slow down and think through the consequences of their action. They were afraid that racial war would tear the regions to pieces and negate

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[336] Ralph McGill, "It Has Happened Here," in Ralph McGill. No Place to Hide, ed. Calvin Logue, 73-74, reprinted from Survey Graphic, September 30, 1941, 449-53.

[337] Sosna, In Search, 48; Jonathan Daniels, "Democracy is Bread," Virginia Quarterly Review 14, no. 4 (Fall 1938): 481-91; RTD, March 6, 1937; Chattanooga News, January 23, 1936; Jonathan Daniels, Chattanooga News, November 25, 1938; see also J. Douglas Smith, Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3-17, 250, 40-75, 107-129.

whatever social and economic gains it had made. Cautious liberals thus changed their tune from that of advancing the South forward, to that of defending gains made and preserving the status quo. Cautious liberals hoped that if they could assuage blacks, then they could restore balance of progress like before. But the unmanageable rising demands of social equality from African Americans and the racial clashes resulting from it proved that cautious liberals' dreams of gradualistic improvements through careful planning were becoming increasingly unrealistic in the postwar South.[338]

Cautious liberals, by abandoning their progressive post early in the war, found it harder to regain the trust of southern blacks. Even conservative southern blacks who aligned themselves with moderate interracial organizations like the Southern Regional Council were getting impatient with their cautious colleagues. The sociologist Guy Johnson, the first executive secretary of the SRC, recounted his experience trying to propose economic initiatives in the executive committee only to be interrupted by black members dismissing the proposal as "not relevant to [southern blacks'] problems." What were relevant were the issues of Jim Crow.[339] Cautious liberals had hoped that the Southern Regional Council, founded from the decaying remains of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, would breathe new life to managed race relationships and economic planning.[340] But try as they might, they could not escape the issue of

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[338] Dabney, interview, 78; Virginius Dabney, Across the Years: Memories of a Virginian (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 162; Myrdal, American Dilemma, 519-20; Smith, Managing White Supremacy, 250-298.
[339] Johnson, interview,73.
[340] One of the original founding documents of the Southern Regional Council, the Durham Statement (1942), which was written by a group of conservative and moderate black educators and newspaper editors, declared their unanimous opposition to segregation. They were, however, willing to wait and allow for gradual desegregation. The second founding documents of the SRC, the Atlanta Statement (1943), a response by white cautious liberals to the Durham Statement, praised the writers of the statement for their courage and moderation, but it completely ignored the call to end segregation gradually. When the two groups got together in Richmond in 1944, there was a great debate whether to include the end of segregation as one of the missions of the Southern Regional Council. Gordon B. Hancock, a black professor and one of the originators of the Durham Statement, wanted the white conferees to concede on some Jim Crow issues so that conservative southern black leaders could go back to the people and say that southern whites want to work with us. Without any concession, Hancock feared, southern black leaders would lose ground to northern black agitators. Cautious liberals and moderates present refused to give up anything.

segregation, not even among their black conservative members. Ultimately, those cautious liberals who founded the Southern Regional Council left the organization one by one, frustrated by blacks who would not leave the issue of segregation alone. When the organization finally made up its mind in 1951 and declared itself against segregation, it lost half of its membership within three years. The southern cautious liberals' model of managed race relationships was no longer acceptable to southern blacks of any political leaning and was no longer a viable instrument of keeping the peace.[341]

Not all cautious liberals were calculating in their view of race and black protest. Some cautious liberals genuinely and earnestly wanted to elevate African American in southern society and give them a fair and equal shot at life. They honestly desired to work with southern black to come up with solutions that were fair and just. They insisted that many southern whites from all classes felt keenly about the suffering of their black neighbors and wanted to do their part in helping blacks move up. [342] Some of them were highly conscious of their and their region's shortcomings. "We wrote our laws to say that while the races were to be separated, we would provide 'separate but equal' educational, travel, recreational and other qualities," Ralph McGill lamented, "This we have not done."[343] And the "plain truth is that national public opinion is against us," McGill continued, "We have allowed enough evil to make the rest of the nation look upon us without sympathy….[we] have allowed local pride to cover up [our] most ghastly

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Howard Odum managed to salvage the meeting from disaster when he vaguely declared that blacks were entitled to every guarantee of opportunity and freedoms afforded to an American citizen. The Richmond conference ultimately adopted vaguely worded resolution connecting the shared grieves of black and southern whites and promised to work together to resolve them. See "The Durham Conference Statement," New South,, January 1964, 3-10; "The Atlanta Conference Statement," Ibid., 11-15; "The Richmond Statement," Ibid., 16-18; Dabney, Across the Years, 163-64; Johnson, interview, 41-45; McDonough, "Men and Women of Goodwill," 213-244.

[341] Dabney, interview, 47; Johnson, interview, 42, 73; "Toward the South of the Future: A Statement of Policy and Aims of the Southern Regional Council," New South, December 1951, 2; David R. Goldfield, Black, White, and Southern: Race Relation and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 70.

[342] W.T. Couch, "Negro in the South," in W.T. Couch ed., Culture in the South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 432-77.

[343] Ralph McGill, AC, August 3, 1948.

crimes."[344] The events of World War II introduced into the cautious liberal journalists' writings "themes once banned as unrealistic and ultimately dangerous." These were themes of liberty, of the moral imperative, and of war idealism.[345] The question of "what were we fighting for?" perplexed cautious liberal journalists. It forced some journalists like Ralph McGill and Hodding Carter to look for a higher purpose to the war. McGill and Carter would eventually recant their previous anti-integration position, but the majority of other cautious liberal journalists like Virginus Dabney and John Temple Graves retreated further to the right as black protest increased.[346] Although they understood that segregation could not go forever, they continued to believe in the pervasive power of the southern "folkways"—the irrational need to cling on to traditions at the price of everything else—which would ultimately prevent serious changes from coming for generations and generations. Cautious liberals preferred to leave the difficulty job of desegregation to future generations, just as the generation of Washington and Jefferson left behind the issue of slavery for the generation of Lincoln and Davis to sort out. In the end, for all their sympathy and reflection, most of cautious liberals refused to cross the Rubicon of segregation until the issue overtook them like a roaring flood.[347]

According to the historian John Kneebone, the rightward march of cautious liberals like Mark Ethridge, John Temple Graves, and Virginius Dabney was the "domestic equivalent of

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[344]Ralph McGill, AC, March 4, 1948; see also Ralph McGill, "The Criticism Coming Down South," in Ralph McGill, The Best of Ralph McGill, ed. Michael Strickland, Harry Davis, and Jeff Strickland (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1980), 97-98.

[345] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 189.

[346] By the late 1940s, McGill was warming up to the idea of more active federal government to help African Americans. McGill continued to believe that the repeal of the poll tax, the FEPC, and the anti-lynching bill might be unconstitutional, but he felt they should be adopted and see what the result would be. See Ralph McGill, "Civil Rights for the Negro," Atlantic Monthly, November 1949, 64-66.

[347] Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 281; Howard Odum, Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, copyrighted 1943), 48; Dabney, Across the Years, 120.

appeasement." [348] By shifting their position from defending black rights to condemning African Americans for wanting their rights without delay, cautious liberals seriously damaged the reputation of southern liberalism as a whole in the eyes of many black leaders and journalists. "Some of these southern liberals used to want to accelerate Negro progress," wrote one black professor, "Now it seems that all they want to do is put on the brakes."[349]Black leaders saw from their dealing with cautious liberals that, for all their idealism and rhetoric, they needed to be pushed and cajoled to get their action caught up with their words. Black leaders learned that they could not rely on cautious liberals for sustainable support. Advanced southern liberals were as equally as amazed, if not disgusted, by the retreat of cautious liberals. The white liberal journalist, Thomas Sancton, in his reply to Dabney's and Ethridge's complaints of black protest, told them to stop worrying about outside agitators and instead focus on educating their fellow white southerners "for concessions on the race issue which the war demands—even though they don't want to be educated," because it was these journalists' editorial responsibility and duty to do so.[350] Lillian Smith concurred with Sancton's sentiment and charged these cautious journalists with "concocting little recipes for sweetening the old segregation," instead of preparing their readers for the inevitable end of Jim Crow.[351] The *Southern Patriot*, in an uncharacteristic but reflective article, criticized both Virginius Dabney and cautious liberals for their retreat, "Mr. Dabney presents a composite picture of the strength and weakness of [cautious] Southern liberals: they see the evils; they are against them, as they are against sin; but when it comes to action, they fight a retreating battle."[352] The retreat of cautious liberals had

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[348] Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists, 199.
[349] Sterling A. Brown, "Out of Their Mouths," in Clayborne and others, eds., Reporting Civil Rights: Part One,.27-28.
[350] Thomas Sancton, "Trouble in Dixie: The Returning Tragic Era," New Republic, January 4, 1943, 11-14
[351] Lillian Smith, "Are We Not Confused," 33.
[352] "Liberal Editors of the South," SP 2, no. 9 (September 1944): 1.

profound negative impact on the legacy of southern liberalism. They would be remembered, if at all, as appeasers to their region's baser elements.[353]

[353] Ralph McGill offered a defense of cautious liberals' staunch defense of the South and its traditions by likened them to the parents of a crippled child. As parents, they were both fiercely devoted to the well being of the child, but also mourned the debilitating curse inflicted on their child, "They love her the more fiercely and defensively because they hate that which crippled the child and which had, therefore, made her weaker and less capable of full participation in life than other children." See Ralph McGill, The South and the Southerner (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964, copyright 1959), 24.

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